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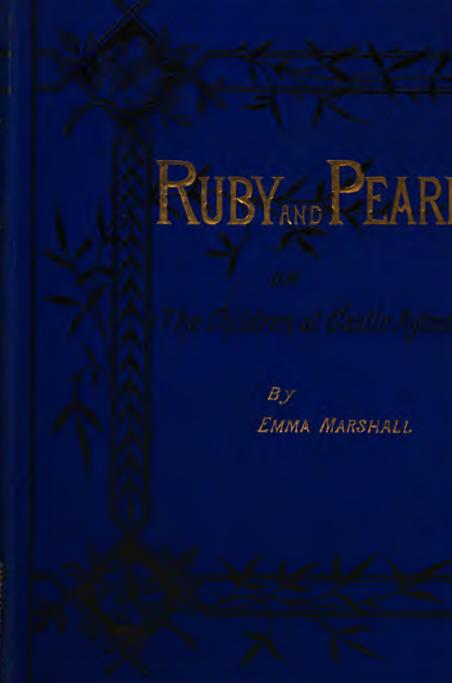
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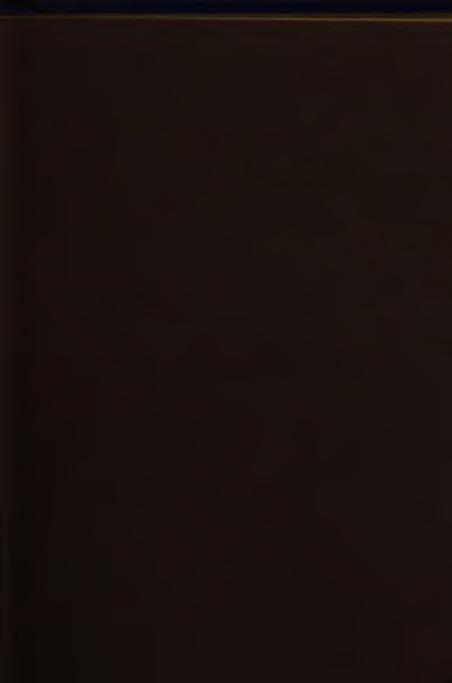
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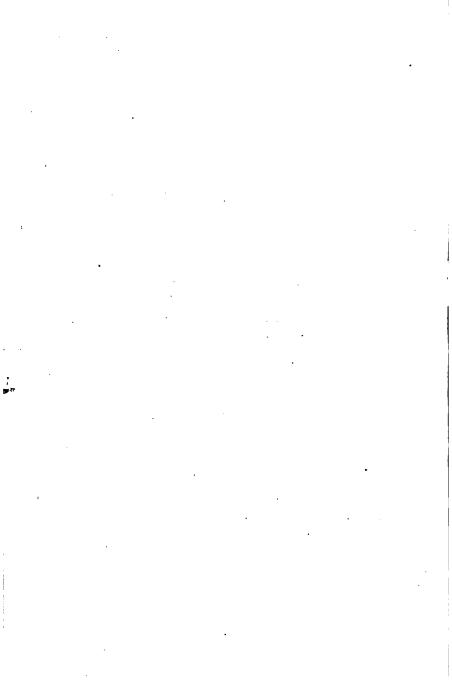
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"To-day, grandmother was leaning on a gentleman's arm."—Page 6.
Frontispiece.

# RUBY AND PEARL

OB

# THE CHILDREN AT CASTLE AYLMER.

A Story for Little Girls.

BY

## EMMA MARSHALL,

AUTHOR OF

"THE THREE LITTLE SISTERS," "THE HAPPY DAYS AT FERNBANE."

"STORIES OF THE CATHEDRAL CITIES OF ENGLAND,"

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To

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Bdith und Christubel.

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# RUBY AND PEARL;

OR.

## THE CHILDREN OF CASTLE AYLMER.

# CHAPTER I.

#### RUBY AND PEARL.

THEY were called Ruby and Pearl—and here they come, out of the sunshine on the broad terrace-walk, into the shadow of the old castle-walls.

For the big bell, swinging backwards and forwards at the top of the clock-tower, with a deep, mellow voice, called the children in to get ready for dinner.

The light, springing, dancing step, with which they had bounded along the terrace, was exchanged for a quiet walk; as they left the June sunshine behind them, where the butterflies were chasing each other over the stiff flower-beds, and the brown bees were diving into the deep bells of the blue and white

campanulas, and the stately peacocks were strutting up and down the terrace, as if the earth they trod was honoured with the fall of their dainty feet!

Ruby and Pearl shook back their long hair, and took off their wide garden hats, and walked demurely down the corridor, with its old oak panels, which led from the sombre hall towards the back of the house to the rooms the children inhabited.

"Ruby and Pearl!"—two little maidens of seven and nine years old-"Mother's jewels," so Ruby remembered a soft, loving voice, had called them years ago. If you had asked her how long ago, she would have said, "Oh! years, and years, and years!" And indeed to the child it did seem like a lifetime. She and her little sister had come over the sea in a big ship since then, and they had exchanged their dark faithful Ayah, for Mrs. Bunce, their present nurse. Yes, and they had seen London and the Zoo, and they had been brought to Castle Aylmer by their father, and left there with their grandmother, old Lady Aylmer, and from thenceforward the quiet life they now led had gone on with no change. Ruby could remember her mother, and little Pearl tried to think she remembered her, too; and Ruby would leave her the fancy, though she told Mrs. Bunce sometimes in confidence, that Pearl was such a very flittle girl when mother went up to the hills, that of course she did not *really* remember what she was like.

"That mother went up to the hills, and that God took her from there to go and live in heaven," was the children's idea of her death. She had gone up to God, and father had come back from the hills alone, and then they came to England.

Now, Lady Aylmer was not really the children's grandmother. I mean she was not their father's mother, but his father's second wife. A grand lady, who had brought their grandpapa many of the beautiful things in Castle Aylmer, and who could afford to live there in solitary state after his death, while their papa was in India. Old Lady Aylmer received the two little girls at Castle Aylmer, hired an experienced woman to be their nurse, and holding fast to the old maxim, that children should be seen and not heard, concerned herself very little about them, except to see that they were quiet and gentle in her presence, and to ask her doctor to look at them now and then, and assure her that they were in good health.

This, happily, was the case. Ruby and Pearl flourished, and were, after their own fashion, happy. The garden, the small fir plantation, and the shrubbery

walk. were free to them, and they had many games, which no other children but themselves would have cared about—"Make-ups!" Pearl called them; enchanted palaces and castles; not grey, solemn old castles like their father's early home, but castles, framed out of the gorgeous Eastern palaces which rise under the burning skies of India. And in the garden and grounds they always found a friend. This was Caleb Scott, the old gardener, who had worked at the stiff flower-beds and emerald turf for fifty years. Caleb had grandsons to help him, of all "sorts and sizes," as he quaintly said,—his daughter's children, whom he was bound to keep, and who, in their turn, would help him, he hoped! There were some wise heads, and amongst them Mrs. Bunce's, who thought differently. "A lazy, good-for-nothing set of carrotty-haired youngsters, who would never earn salt to their porridge," she often said; and truth compels me to confess, her view of the case was a just one!

And now I am forgetting the big bell, which, after one loud toll, stopped, just as Ruby and Pearl reached the door of the nursery, where they found Mrs. Bunce fuming at their tardy appearance.

"Miss Aylmer," Mrs. Bunce began with great solemnity, "I really am ashamed of you, coming in

so late, and the water in the basin getting cold, for nothing but hot water will clean your faces. Why, they are like any chimneysweep's;" and Mrs. Bunce pulled Ruby towards her, and passed a piece of soapy flannel over the little face.

"Miss Pearl, can't you take off your boots? You'll be late again to-day, and you know who'll have the blame if you are late."

Little Pearl, who was seated on the floor, struggling to get off her dirty little boots, looked up from under the cloud of tangled golden hair with her big blue eyes at Mrs. Bunce, and said—

"There's lots of time, Bunny; the bell has only just stopped."

"Don't talk nonsense about your 'lots of time,' and company in the dining-room too!"

"Company!" said Ruby. "Oh! please don't scrub my nails so hard;" and Ruby's voice shook in sympathy with Mrs. Bunce's energetic scrubbing.

"It's my opinion you two children ought to have something else to do than grub in the garden like those idle Pidsleys. I wonder your papa don't order you a governess."

"We can read and write; at least, I can," said Ruby; "but who's the company?"

"It's a gentleman-that's all I know," and Mrs.

Bunce began a vigorous brushing of Ruby's dark chestnut locks, and then attacked Pearl's golden ones, and finally, with clean white frocks and dainty little aprons, with bibs edged with pink, the children went down stairs hand-in-hand, just as another ringing of the big bell in the clock tower was answered by the slow beats on the gong by Samuelson the footman—a sound which scarcely ever failed to send Ruby's thoughts back to another home where they had lived, before the sad day when mother went up to the hills and never came back again.

They waited in the hall, as they always did, till their grandmother appeared, coming slowly down a few wide stairs, and, passing into the dining-room, said—

"Good morning, children," and stooping, would give each of them a kiss on the cheek or forehead.

To-day, grandmother was leaning on a gentleman's arm, "the company" of whom Mrs. Bunce had spoken.

"Hugh's children," Lady Aylmer said; and then as they passed on into the dining-room Ruby caught the words, "They are like their mother's family."

It was not Lady Aylmer's habit to talk to Ruby and Pearl. She would ask them a few questions between her soup and the next course; she would complain if little Pearl dropped a fork, or made a clinking with her spoon on the plate. And now to-day poor little Pearl felt that with "company" present, she must have company manners, and in her efforts to be very careful she met with a sad misfortune.

Scarcely had Samuelson filled her glass with water than the "company" looked at her with a merry smile and said—

"And which of the jewels are you, pray?—though I need hardly ask."

Poor Pearl put out her hand to take up her glass, as she answered the question in a low, shy undertone, "Pearl."

The hand missed its aim, and oh! dreadful calamity, the glass rolled over, and the water poured upon the snowy damask, which sucked it up greedily as it spread like a flood in all directions, till it reached the great silver epergne in the middle of the table, and then settled in a little lake at the foot of one of the cupids which bore the weight of the erection upon their fat shoulders.

"Margaret!" This was enough; the word in itself showed the case was serious. "Leave the table, Margaret; your dress is wet!"

"Oh! let me plead for her," the kind stranger

exclaimed; "it was my fault for speaking to her just as she was going to drink some water."

"Leave the table, Margaret. Thank you, Sir Ronald, but the child may catch cold from the damp on her dress."

Poor little Pearl departed sorrowfully, tears coursing down her cheeks. Ruby was following, when Lady Aylmer said—

"Sit still, Rosamond." Then, as if nothing had happened, Lady Aylmer went on talking to her guest, and Ruby's ears were open, though her heart was aching for Pearl.

#### CHAPTER II.

#### "THE COMPANY."

"ELEANOR would be only too glad to come, I know,"
Ruby heard the "company" saying—otherwise Sir
Ronald Bruce,—who was a distant connection of old
Lady Aylmer. "She is really without a home, and
her means are very small."

"Means!" repeated Ruby to herself; "what are means?" And I think she fixed her large, dark blue eyes steadily and inquiringly on the "company;" for again the bright smile rippled over that pleasant face, and he said—

"You'd find cousin Eleanor a good governess—and"——

"They know nothing about it, Sir Ronald," Lady Aylmer said, interrupting him; "and I really fear Mrs. Christian might find it dull here. My health prevents me from seeing any one but my doctor and the clergyman sometimes. The nearest neighbours are six miles off, and if they were nearer, I don't know that it would make any difference. I have neither health nor spirits to enter into society. When Hugh returns to England it will be different—he must then act as he sees best."

"Yes, yes!" said Sir Ronald; "but I suspect Sir Hugh will finish his term of service; and these little people will want some variety before then. I have no children of my own; but I like little folks to have all the fun they can get."

"Rosamond, if you have finished your dinner, you may leave the room."

Thus addressed, Ruby awoke from her dream, wondering as to who cousin Eleanor could be, and if she really was coming to Castle Aylmer—and folding her hands, said her little grace in a low whisper, slid down from her chair at her grandmother's bidding, and was going away, when Sir Ronald said—

"What! Are you going without a word, as well as the other jewel?" I have never been at Castle Aylmer before; ask Grannie if she will allow you to show me over the house and grounds. There's some queer old tapestry I have heard."

Ruby was speechless. The "company's" boldness struck her with awe—did he not call her grandmother "Grannie"? and did he not speak to her and Pearl with a merry smile? bringing back to the child the memory of her own father's free, tender way with his little girls.

"May I have the children this afternoon as guides?" Sir Ronald asked, turning for direct permission to Lady Aylmer.

- "Certainly, if you wish it, Sir Ronald, but"-----
- "Come, that's capital. Now we will enjoy ourselves, Miss Rosamond—at least, I mean to enjoy myself. Where shall I find you? On the terrace with the peacocks in an hour from this time?"

"Speak, Rosamond, and thank Sir Ronald for his kindness," Lady Aylmer said.

But Rosamond's words stuck in her throat. Shall I tell you what she felt inclined to do? To throw her arms round the dear good "company," and tell him she loved him, for he was like father. But Ruby restrained herself, and kept back her enthusiasm till she had passed the boundary of the hall. Then she rushed down the corridor, flew up the narrow stairs, and opening the nursery door with a bounce, which made little Pearl descend from the deep window seat, where she was forgetting her sorrows in a book of Mrs. Bunce's, she exclaimed—

"Pearl! Pearl! the 'company' has asked us to meet him on the terrace—and we are to take him all over the castle, and into the garden, and to see Caleb, and—— Oh! isn't he a dear, delightful man, and like—Pearl, who is he like?"

"Father," said little Pearl; "is it father, Ruby?"

"Yes; not so much in his face, perhaps, for father is handsomer—and father's hair is brown and grey, not yellow and red, and father's beard is ever so much longer; but it is his voice and his way, and —oh! dear. I don't know what it is, but I know I love him already. And Pearl," Ruby exclaimed in a low mysterious voice, "And Pearl—I do believe there is a secret between the 'company' and grandmother."

"A secret, what about?"

"I think," Ruby said, "it is about some 'Cousin Eleanor.' She is coming here—here, to Aylmer Castle."

"I don't want her," said little Pearl ruefully. "I can't bear company at dinner; and then to be sent away! It was very unkind of grandmother,—how could I help setting-up the water?" Poor little Pearl had a curious habit of putting the cart before the horse with some words.

"Up-setting, you mean, Pearl. Well, it was tiresome. Was Bunny angry?"

"She said I wasn't to go out any more," said Pearl; "and I've only got on my clean holland. I can't go out with the 'company.'"

"Oh yes, you can; he won't mind," said Ruby.
"Let's make haste and get our hats. He said an hour—and it must be nearly an hour. If you are quick, Pearl, we shall be out on the terrace before Bunny comes up from dinner."

Then Ruby rummaged in Mrs. Bunce's neatly-kept drawers for their better hats—their best hats were locked up in the wardrobe, and only brought out on grand occasions.

The "better" hats were decidedly not improved by the rough handling they now underwent in Ruby's excited haste. But at last the hats were on,—the only misfortune being that in Ruby's eagerness to get the elastic under Pearl's hair, it broke and sprang back into Ruby's eye.

The poor eye smarted a good deal, and the water trickled down Ruby's cheeks, but she pressed bravely on through all difficulties, and the children were just racing off when Pearl said—

"O Ruby! our boots!—we've only shoes, and Bunny said if ever I went out again in these shoes she would down-pour the water on my head in the bath."

That was a dreadful consideration, for Ruby had by experience known what the misery of a cold douche from Bunny's avenging hand meant.

- "Oh! but it's so dry and hot to-day,—that was a wet day when you were punished."
- "But if Bunny told me," said little conscientious Pearl.

There is an old saying that he who deliberates is lost. The delay which the question about the shoes caused stopped the children in their flight to the terrace. Mrs. Bunce's heavy step was heard coming up the back stairs, and she was upon the children in a minute.

"Where are you off to?" she asked. "It's too hot to be racing about in the sun; you must come and stay quiet for an hour or two. It's just the time for you to do your work; come."

- "We can't," said Ruby.
- "We shan't," said Pearl.
- "I shall give you just double of the pockethandkerchief now, for this," was Mrs. Bunce's reply. "And see what a state you've made the bottom drawer in. I never *did* see such children."

Ruby and Pearl knew, or ought to have known by this time, that all resistance to Mrs. Bunce's will was So, though Pearl cried loudly, and I am afraid like a very naughty girl, and though Ruby pleaded that the "company" had told them to meet him on the terrace with the peacocks, and that grandmother had said they might, Mrs. Bunce ruled they might not. The two little workboxes were brought out, and the "better hats" put away, and the two hot, excited children were forced to sit up at the table, Mrs. Bunce ruthlessly moving the pins, which showed the appointed task, exactly half as far again along the hem. Crying and pouting, and twitching the needle, and snatching the thread, did no good. Mrs. Bunce was determined, and one by one little Ruby set stitches in the hem with a sticky needle, and through cambric which was limp with a big tear that had fallen on it. little Pearl held on as long as she could under the trial, but all she had gone through made her sleepy, and she nodded and swayed upon her high chair, till Mrs. Bunce was moved with compassion, and lifting her down, laid her on the horse-hair sofa under the window, and throwing a thin shawl over her said, "The child must sleep her sleep out." Good little

Ruby toiled on, and had nearly reached the holes made by the first pins when steps were heard, and then Samuelson's voice—

"This way, sir;" and then the door opened, and the "company" himself came in.

#### CHAPTER III.

#### OLD CALEB AND HIS BOYS.

"Well," Sir Ronald began, "so I have found my little faithless women at last. Why, I thought you were going to turn out paste, and not real jewels, after all."

At the sound of the ringing, cheery voice, little Pearl woke and started up.

"Lazy little girl!" Sir Ronald said, sitting down at the end of the sofa and putting his arm round Pearl. "Do you know I have been walking up and down the terrace with the peacocks till I was tired, and all because you never came?"

"Oh, please," Ruby began, "we wanted ever so much to come, but Bunny would not let us."

"I am sure, sir," said Mrs. Bunce, curtseying and bowing at every word, "I had no idea you ordered the children to come out."

"O Bunny! we told you," Pearl now found voice to say.

"I did not know, sir, I am sure, you would wish for the young ladies," Mrs. Bunce continued; "but I will get them ready at once."

Pearl sprang up and followed Ruby into the adjoining room; and soon both little girls came back in their best, not the "better" hats, and another spotless white frock, with a blue sash, had replaced the holland, and boots to match the hats in quality were buttoned on—and the children were ready.

"Dear me!" Sir Ronald said, "the jewels are in a very grand setting now. Come along. But where do you keep your toys and books?"

"We havn't many," Ruby said. "Our dolls are very, very old, and we have only a box of dominoes; but we don't want them. We have our own games in the garden."

"Yes, our make-ups," said little Pearl, dancing along as she held Sir Ronald's hand. "Would you like to see our jungle where the tigers come, and the hut where the little girl is ill and the doctor goes to give her physic? Ruby is the doctor—Doctor Fox."

Sir Ronald laughed, but this time not such a merry laugh. There was something pathetic to him in the motherless lives of the little jewels; for Sir Ronald had still a mother, to whom, big man as he was, he told all his troubles and all his joys; and he saw her

surrounded with children and grandchildren, to every one of whose lives she added a ray of sunshine by her constant love and interest.

Indeed Sir Ronald's mother was so full of sympathy with any one in trouble, that the moment she heard that cousin Eleanor was poor and wanted a home, she thought of the children at Castle Aylmer, and settled in her own mind that she would try to bring about that these same little children should have cousin Eleanor for a friend, and that she should have a home at Castle Aylmer.

So she wrote to old Lady Aylmer, and did not receive a very encouraging answer; then she wrote to Sir Hugh, but the reply from India did not come as soon as she expected. So she said to Sir Ronald one day—

"Suppose you take Castle Aylmer on the way to London, Ronald, and see what you can do?"

And Sir Ronald declared that, though he could not say Castle Aylmer was in his way to London, or in anybody's way to anywhere, he would make it his way, to please her, and serve cousin Eleanor; and thus it was that the "company" appeared at the children's dinner that beautiful June day.

When Sir Ronald got the children out of doors, he scarcely knew them for the same demure little people

he had seen in the dining-room. They dragged him down a grassy slope at the end of the terrace, and then darted off to find their favourite old Caleb. But Caleb had gone home early that hot afternoon, and only his eldest grandson was to be seen in the kitchen garden.

"That's Jer," Ruby said. "His name is Jeremy, and I am afraid he's not very good to his grand-father. We like Ben the best, but he is not here."

As she spoke, a rough, carrotty head was seen emerging from behind a cucumber frame, and a dole-ful voice called out—

"Yes, I be here, Miss Ruby, and I want to speak to ye."

The child ran to her rough-headed friend, and soon came back.

"Oh! poor Ben has cut his head, and it's bleeding dreadful, and that unkind Jer only beat him because he has broken the glass of the cucumber frame. Come out, Ben, and show your poor head."

Ben peered out cautiously, and advanced a few paces towards Sir Ronald; then, with three or four gigantic strides over the celery beds, Jer came up.

"You good-for-nothing! how dare you?" he said, giving his little brother a cuff on the head with his heavy hand.

Then Sir Ronald's voice sounded in a tone Ruby and Pearl could hardly recognise—

"You coward, you bully, to strike your little brother!" and Sir Ronald interposed his tall, erect figure between the two boys.

"He's allus in mischief, he is," said Jer; "he broke the winder of the back-kitchen last week, and then I got the blame. Grandfather will just be in a rage with me, that's all."

Then Sir Ronald took out his pocket handkerchief, and going to a big watering-pot which stood near, he soaked it well in it, and then skilfully bound up poor Ben's head, which really had got a very severe cut.

"Now, then, where does he live?" Sir Ronald said, "and we'll take him home to his mother."

"Please, sir, we be orphants; we live with grand-father—all of us."

"Poor little chaps," Sir Ronald said kindly.
"Well, my jewels, lead the way."

"Caleb's cottage is close by the plantation," Ruby said, "and then we'll take you up our hill."

"Well, let us see this child home first," Sir Ronald said, "for he is as pale as a ghost. Come, my boy, cheer up; I'll take care of you."

Ben shuffled along the garden path, and Sir

Ronald turned back to say to the great awkward fellow, who was resuming his labour at the celery beds—

"Remember this, Jer, or whatever your name is, remember only cowards and bullies ever hurt anything smaller and weaker than themselves; and mind you never lay hands on your little brother again."

"Please, sir," said little Ben, "he smacks us all by turns, and he threw a turnip at grandfather t'other day."

"Don't tell tales, little one," was all Sir Roland said to this; but there was a twitching at his mouth which little Pearl saw, and told Ruby afterwards that she believed the "company" was nearly laughing.

Ben was escorted to the gardener's cottage, where old Caleb, exhausted with the heat, was making tea out of a black teapor with a broken spout.

"What's up now, Ben?" he said; "you are allus grieving. Beg your pardon, little ladies, and yours, sir. This be a strange world, and things go crooked; but we know the Lord will make it all right at last, when it be His will."

"Ah! my man," Sir Ronald said quickly, "you have got hold of the right comfort; that's right."

"Ay, sir, so I often tell these little ladies. It does seem kind of hard that my poor girl should have lost her husband, and then died herself, worn out, before she was thirty, and leave me with all them boys. There's four of 'em, sir. Jer, he's a rough one, but he does my work for me; and Will, he's stable-boy; and Hal is gone off nobody knows where, he's idle; and little Benjie, bless him! But then I don't fear I shall ever want bread; and I believe in the Lord's word of promise, sir. Then these dear little ladies, they often cheer me up, that they do. It's been mighty hot to-day, sir—one of the hottest days I ever remember."

"I can't say that," Sir Ronald replied, "for I know what hot days in India mean."

"Ay, ay, foreign parts are hotter, no doubt, sir. There, Benjie, my lad, take a sup of tea and you'll feel better."

Ruby and Pearl were getting impatient to proceed, and after a few more kind words, the children showed the way to the plantation, where they were so much at home that they knew every little path running through the fir trees, and every turn in the winding way which led to their hill.

Their hill was only a mound of rising ground cropping out of the plantation of fir, but it answered for a mountain to the children. The hut where the sick child lived was just below, and there Sir Ronald, lying full-length on the soft turf, with his hat tipped up over his eyes, heard the story between sleeping and waking of the "make up," and half in his own dream-world and half in the children's, forgot time till he heard the clanging of the big bell, and Ruby and Pearl exclaimed—

"The dressing-bell! Oh, grandmother will be so angry if you are not ready."

"Pull me up, then!" Sir Ronald said, giving a hand to each little girl. Then, with much laughter and weak attempts on the part of the children, Sir Ronald was on his feet, and they were soon on their way to the house again.

"But how about the old tapestry and the castle? I have seen nothing of all that you promised to show me."

"But we will show you to-morrow," Ruby said.
"You see Caleb and Ben took up so much time, and"——

"I shall be off before you open your eyes tomorrow," Sir Ronald said; "but I shall not forget you. I shall send you a box from London to begin with, and next time I come perhaps I shall find cousin Eleanor here."

The children were silent for a moment, then Pearl gave a deep sigh and said—

"I don't think we want her."

But Ruby, in her practical and more matter-offact way, said—

"What is she like? We might like her."

"I can't tell you," Sir Ronald replied; "cousin Eleanor is not a person to describe. But, look here, when she comes—if she does come—you must write and tell me what you think of her and of the box, of course."

"Oh yes, the box!" Ruby said joyfully; "will it be a big one?"

"Well, yes; and perhaps there will be something in it for Caleb and the boys. But who is that?" Sir Ronald said, as he saw a tall gentleman in a black coat sauntering leisurely up the steps to the great hall door.

"It's Mr. Dacre, the clergyman, come to dinner with you," Ruby suggested. "He does come to see grandmother now and then."

"You don't say so! Then I must make haste. Good-bye, little ones; don't forget me!" and with a flying leap Sir Ronald vanished up the steep side of the terrace, and the children saw him no more.

# CHAPTER IV.

#### THE BIG BOX.

THE long summer days went on in the old quiet, dreamy way after Sir Ronald's visit. The children heard nothing of him, or of cousin Eleanor, from their grandmother. She said even less to them than usual, and the old castle seemed to be like that of the Sleeping Beauty in the fairy tale, and the children fell into their old "makeups;" and if they mentioned "The Box," or "Cousin Eleanor," or "The Company," it was as if they were a make-up too, and realities only, in their own little heads.

At last the radiant weather was over; dark clouds gathered thicker and thicker day by day. The peacocks screamed in their shrill voices that rain was coming; the wind rustled in the fir trees, and whispered that rain was coming; the birds twittered and flew hither and thither; and Ruby's favourite swallows flew so near the ground that their forked tails seemed to touch it.

At last one morning there was the low swishing sound of a regular downpour, and after their morning reading and writing and work was done, the little girls had to content themselves with the house instead of the garden.

Such a dull, uneventful day it seemed likely to be, with "nothing to do." Mrs. Bunce had a faceache, and went about with a large piece of red flannel and cotton wool tied round her head. The face-ache is a trial to most people's temper, and Mrs. Bunce's was no exception to the rule. She was decidedly cross, and would not allow Ellen, the little nursemaid and general helper, to come up, as she did sometimes on wet days, to have a game.

"I can't bear any noise to-day," Mrs. Bunce said, "with this pain ramping and raging; and I call you a pair of unfeeling children to expect it—that I do. Most little girls would be sorry, and try to do all they could for me, instead of wanting to do just what would worry me. I call it very unfeeling and hard-hearted—I do!"

Ruby gave up all hopes of Ellen's society for that day; but Pearl, in a fit of contrariness, took to hopping round and round the table, which process naturally jarred the room and Mrs. Bunce's nerves at the same time.

"Don't, Pearl, don't," Ruby pleaded.

"I shall. I like to make the things jig. Look, Ruby, how the knife and the plate 'shudders and shidders.'"

"I'll teach you to 'shidder and shudder,' you unkind little thing, with no more feeling than a clothes horse," Mrs. Bunce, now really angry as well as in great pain, exclaimed.

"Pearl!" Ruby said, "come and watch the rain splashing from the old spout; it's splendid to-day."

The attraction of the hideous old gargoyle, which conveyed the water from a leaden pipe running round the grey wall of the castle hall, which bounded one side of the children's window, was not to be resisted. Pearl mounted to the window seat by Ruby's side, and peace was restored.

After about five minutes' quiet, steps were heard coming up the stairs leading from the corridor—heavy steps and slow, as of some one carrying a burden. Then there was a knock at the door. Ruby flew to open it, and what should she see but Jer Pidsley, bearing on his shoulders a box—a very big box—which was so heavy that his head was bowed, and the rough carroty hair was all that could be seen

as he came forward into the nursery, and let the big box down with a tremendous thud upon the floor.

"Dear heart! what are you about, Jer Pidsley?" said Mrs. Bunce to the exhausted Jer, who stood leaning against the wall puffing and blowing, and rubbing back his thick red mane from his forehead with his fustian coat sleeve. "Who told you to bring that great chest here?"

Jer grinned, showing his white teeth from end to end.

"Mr. Samuelson told me to heave it up; it's for the young ladies. I hope there's something for me in it, that's all."

"Oh! it's the box; it's the box the 'company' said he would send. O Jer! open it; do open it," the little girls exclaimed, dancing round the box in a state of delirious excitement. "Jer, Jer, do open it, for Bunny's face aches so badly, she will never, never open it."

Jer scratched his head, and hesitated.

"Seems to me I ought to have something for breaking my back with that there stunning box."

"Go and ask for a screw-driver directly," said Mrs. Bunce, who, swaying herself from side to side, had nevertheless drawn near to inspect the box. "There's our name outside, Bunny; do look;" for on a white card was written:—

# THE MISSES AYLMER,

# CASTLE AYLMER,

Near CRANWORTH.

Carriage Paid.

June 25.

"Oh! you poor Bunny," said Pearl, moved to sympathy by her joy. "Oh! you poor Bunny, perhaps there'll be something in the box to cure your toothache."

"It isn't toothache, my dearie," Mrs. Bunce returned sadly and solemnly; "for toothache there's a cure, sharp and short; and I'd put on my bonnet this moment, rain or no rain, and have it out at Mr. Short's, down in the village, if it was a tooth; but it's neuralgy, and it's all on the nerves, and I daresay it makes me a bit fidgetty, my dear."

So peace was declared between little Pearl and Mrs. Bunce just as Jer returned with the screw-driver, followed by Ellen, who was all eagerness to see what the big box that had nearly broken Jer's back could contain.

The lid was very firmly nailed down, and there

was a great deal of crunching and wrenching and cracking before the last nail fairly gave way.

At the top of the box when the lid was lifted there was a quantity of hay, which smelt sweetly as the two little pairs of hands rummaged in it.

Under the hay was a covering of white paper, and the very first thing the children saw was a large envelope addressed to Ruby and Pearl.

"Oh, don't stop to read the letter," Pearl said impatiently. "Let's go on; there's heaps and heaps of white parcels, and hay stuffed in between them all."

"I think," said Ruby gravely, "it would be nicer to read the letter first; it's what the 'company' meant us to do, as it was at the top, and it will tell us what is in the box." So Ruby opened the big envelope, and read as follows, written in a round hand, easy to make out:—

"DEAR JEWELS,—Here's the box at last; nailed down, I think, all sure and fast. In it are toys for girls and boys, such as I had long years ago, when I was young and brisk, you know. So skip and run, and don't be quiet, except you're bid by Mrs. Bunce, and then be sure you stop at once. Play battledore and shuttlecock, and with the ball the ninepins knock. On wet days cut the pictures out, and in

the scrap-book paste about. Give little Ben the spinning-top; and Jer the book, which he must stop, to read, and try to learn from it, all that a gardener does befit. And now, good-bye,—well, one thing more. Some day you'll see before the door, a carriage stop; and guess who'll step into the hall? A friend that's better than a ball,—you'll know her name? 'Cousin Eleanor?' Yes, the same!

"You know my name, — I need not say, I'm RONALD BRUCE, of Lindenhay."

"Why it's poetry, I declare," said Mrs. Bunce, who was quite forgetting her neuralgia; "and what good girls you ought to be!"

"It's a beautiful letter," said little Ruby, "and so easy to read. O Pearl!" For poor little Pearl, who had hardly been able to restrain her impatience, now turned out parcel after parcel, while Ellen kept up a series of exclamations, and the paper coverings were torn off by the eager children, and the floor of the old nursery was strewn with such a heap of toys as had never been seen there before; at any rate, not since Sir Hugh was a little boy, and played there with his sister, who had died long before the children were born.

"I wonder there are no dolls," said Ellen; "little ladies mostly have dolls."

Sir Ronald's ideas were all for active games. He thought Ruby's grave face and both children's subdued quiet manner indoors unnatural. He thought of his little nephews and niece at Lindenhay, with their free, happy life, with his own mother, and the contrast struck him as painful.

"I will send the box. Cousin Eleanor will do the rest," he thought, and so the "company" brightened the lives of the little jewels by his kindness.

### CHAPTER V.

### GRANDMOTHER'S BOUDOIR.

RUBY and Pearl went down to dinner that day with flushed cheeks and bright eyes. How they longed to have it all out,—to tell their joy. Many children who read this story know that the first impulse when anything delightful happens is to run and tell mother, or some kind, loving aunt, who fills mother's place; that desire to let some one we love share our joy is the craving for sympathy which lives in most hearts, more or less. In sorrow it is the same; if there is grief, or a little trouble, instantly we long to tell those we love best, because we know that our trouble is theirs, and that they will be sorry for It is the most beautiful thing in the world when we go in this way to GoD with joys and sorrows, telling Him simply and honestly what is in our hearts. It brings us so close to Him; and the dear Lord was a child once, and can enter into

everything — little pleasures, little sorrows, little joys, and little cares.

Lady Aylmer was just the same as usual on this wet day, and Ruby and Pearl felt so different! At last, Ruby said—

"Grandmother, Sir Ronald Bruce has sent us such a lovely box full of toys."

"May we put up the croquet on the lawn, grandmother?" Pearl asked. "May we play cockshuttle in the gallery,—may we?"

"Gently, Margaret! A little more wine, Benson. Very kind of Sir Ronald, I am sure. I will speak to Samuelson about the croquet; and, as it is wet today, you may come and sit with me in the boudoir for an hour this afternoon. I have had a letter from Sir Ronald, and one from your father. I will read some parts of them to you if you are good children. Bring your work"——

"Yes, grandmother; but may we play cock—I mean dore-battle in the gallery?"

"You may play where the tapestry hangs, but not where the pictures are. And, Ruby, you must write to Sir Ronald Bruce, and express your thanks. It must be a well-written letter, remember."

"Sir Ronald wrote to us, grandmother, a beautiful, wonderful letter, all in rhyme."

- "How very strange! I expect Sir Ronald is apt to spoil children sadly. I have heard the little Ibettsons are very noisy and undisciplined."
  - "Who are they?" Ruby asked.
- "The children of Sir Ronald's sister, Mrs. Ibbetson, who is, like your father, in India. They live with Lady Bruce and Sir Ronald."

Pearl thought to herself it must be delightful to be the little Ibbetsons; but she had no time to say so then, for Lady Aylmer rose from the table, and the children knew that was their signal for departure.

"Excuse the work, Bunny, to-day, won't you?" Pearl said coaxingly, when Mrs. Bunce came up from her dinner in the servants' hall. "You'll excuse the work; and how is your poor face?"

"It's very bad; and I think I shall go and lie down and try to take a nap. Yes, you may play with your toys this afternoon till it's time to go to her ladyship, and Ellen will come and get you ready at four o'clock."

The time passed quickly in examining all the presents—the croquet set, the skipping-ropes, the battledores, the cup and ball, the dominoes, the pictures, the scrap-books.

- "It's almost too much at once," Ruby said.
- "No, it isn't. I wish there was twice as much,"

Pearl exclaimed. "I wish it would stop raining, then we could go and see how Ben likes the top."

Ellen had now appeared on the scene, and helped the children to put away the toys in the big cupboard—a cupboard of which Pearl stood greatly in awe; for one dreadful day Mrs. Bunce had shut her up in it for five long, dark minutes, for a punishment; and Pearl was too frightened to cry, and in the darkness and stillness heard the mice racing about behind the boards.

The cupboard was always called the "Mouse cupboard" from that day; and I really think that the reason the few dejected old toys in it were left undisturbed on the shelves was from the fear of a little, soft brown thing coming out of its hole to see what was the matter.

Ellen proceeded to dust the shelves, and put all the old toys in a corner, when, all unperceived, the black and white pussie, Mrs. Muff, had crept up behind Ellen from the housekeeper's room, and when an ancient doll's cradle was moved, Mrs. Muff darted into the cupboard. One little squeak was heard, and away she ran with the tail of the poor mouse hanging out of her mouth.

And now Pearl's fears were changed into sorrow, and she clung to Ellen in distress, as Muff growled, and left her hold of the poor mouse, only to take it up again in her cruel jaws with a firmer grip. This pity for the mouse changed Pearl's feelings about the whole race, and she almost thought she should not mind it if she were shut up in the cupboard for a minute. Mice were not such terrible creatures, after all. Muff looked a great deal more terrible, with her glaring eyes and puffed-out tail, and cruel, gleaming teeth.

At four o'clock Ruby and Pearl were a little calmed down from the excitement of the box and all it contained, and walked demurely down stairs, up the long corridor, across the wide hall to the short flight of steps, which led to their grandmother's boudoir. A heavy, red curtain hung over the door, and the children always enjoyed the fun of lifting it at each end, and meeting in the middle, where it was all so dark and mysterious. At last Ruby gave the accustomed little tap, and then came the accustomed answer—

"Come in!" And the children took the two little chairs, which were kept for their use, and sat down.

Lady Aylmer was a very handsome old lady, and everything in the room was handsome. The only part of Castle Aylmer which was modern—that is, new—and like other people's houses, was to be found in the room which she inhabited.

Lady Aylmer had many beautiful things about her—china and pictures, and a great many books, bound in crimson and gold, "too good to read," Ruby thought.

"Well," Lady Aylmer began, "this has been a very wet day. Don't fidget with the fringe of the table cover, Pearl; where is your work?"

"Please, grandmother, Bunny — I mean Mrs. Bunce—has a faceache, and couldn't fix our work."

"Prepare your work, you mean, my dear Ruby, do not cross your feet one over the other. I have had a letter from your papa to-day, and one from your kind friend Sir Ronald Bruce. There is a letter for you from your father."

Ruby sprang up with extended hands.

"Gently, gently; see now," for Ruby had in her eagerness thrown over the basket containing her grandmother's crewels, and they were scattered hither and thither. "You must learn to be more gentle and lady-like, Ruby; it is a great annoyance to me when you are so rough."

Poor Ruby! she meekly picked up the scattered crewels, and reseated herself without a word.

"Your father," Lady Aylmer began, "thinks that,

as my health is so very indifferent, it would be a relief to me if you had a governess. I hardly know whether the presence of another person in the house will not be an added trouble; however, my cousin, Sir Ronald Bruce, is also anxious about it, and I have decided to make the experiment. Mrs. Christian is a connection of Sir Ronald's and of my own; she has been left a widow with one boy, with extremely narrow means, and—— But I need not tell you about this. Your business is to be good children, and give her as little trouble as possible, and "——

<sup>&</sup>quot;Shall we see her little boy?" Pearl asked.

<sup>&</sup>quot;No; he is at school, and will certainly not come here."

<sup>&</sup>quot;May we call her 'Cousin Eleanor'? Sir Ronald called her Cousin Eleanor," Pearl said.

<sup>&</sup>quot;I shall leave that to Mrs. Christian," Lady Aylmer said. "Now I will read you your father's letter, or the part of it which refers to you."

### CHAPTER VI.

# SIR HUGH'S LETTER.

LADY AYLMER settled her glasses carefully on her nose and began to read—

"My Dear Mother,—I think the plan Bruce proposes a good one. It will take a weight off my mind about the children, for I feel you are not strong enough to have them much with you, and they are getting too old to be left altogether to servants. I remember Eleanor Bruce as a very charming, accomplished woman, and I was sorry to see that she had lost her husband so suddenly.

"I will arrange with you about salary, and"——
Lady Aylmer stopped, then went on: "The rainy
season has been very much prolonged this year,
and I begin to think I shall be glad when I have
earned my full pension." Again Lady Aylmer
paused.

"That is all, I think," she said. "Sir Ronald

tells me," taking up another letter, "that Mrs. Christian will be at Castle Aylmer on Thursday."

"Why, that's to-morrow, grandmother," the children exclaimed.

"Yes; and I must send in to Cranworth to meet the last train. You will not see Mrs. Christian till Friday morning. Here is your papa's letter; shall I read it to you?"

"Oh no, thank you, grandmother; we can always read father's letters, because he prints them out so clearly."

"Yes, and so did the 'company.'"

"Who?" asked Lady Aylmer.

Pearl hastened to say, upon receiving an admonishing look from Ruby—

"Sir Ronald, I mean. He writes very, very plain."

Then hugging their father's precious letter close, Ruby kissed her grandmother, and, taking Pearl's hand, the two children's visit came to an end for that day.

They had no work, and they would only fidget, Lady Aylmer said to herself, as she sank back in her easy-chair and resumed the second sheet of the *Times*, which she had been reading when the children came into the room.

"We'll take father's letter to the gallery to read,"

Ruby said, "and then we will get the battledores and play till tea-time."

"Yes; only I wish I could keep the cock shuttle going," little Pearl sighed. "It makes my back ache so, always picking it up."

"When we play in the garden, we'll make Ben pick it up. Dear me, I wish we could see Ben, and find out if he can spin his top."

And now the children had come to the gallery, which ran right along Castle Aylmer, and from which, at intervals, rooms opened. This was the very oldest part of the old castle. The walls were so thick that the tall pointed windows were each in a niche which made quite a little room of its own. There were seven of these niches, and every one looked over on a beautiful bit of country, set like a picture in a frame in the old stone masonry of the castle. floor was dark oak, and the walls were all in panels; in each panel hung a portrait of some of the old Aylmers. Some of these were so cracked and faded that they were scarcely to be made out as men and women at all; but some in the time of Charles the First, and later, were as fresh and bright as if they had been painted yesterday.

The children always called the middle of the seven windows of the gallery their room. It was wider, and had a low oak seat, which just held the two little figures, as they nestled into it—Pearl's legs dangling down, Ruby's curled up, cobbler fashion, under her, in a way which I cannot approve or think good for Ruby's figure; only I want to show you the two little sisters, as they sat in the gallery of the castle to read their father's letter. There was a quaint device in coloured glass in the window above them, and as a ray of western sunshine struggled through the clouds, the old red and yellow glass cast a pattern on the dark floor at the children's feet. touched their hairs in passing, and made Ruby's like the colour of a chestnut lying on the grass just out of its shell, and Pearl's like the goldest of gold threads that ever silkworm spun in the mulberry groves of sunny France.

But the sunbeam had not done its work of illumination, it grew and strengthened as the clouds dispersed, and finally lighted up—as it had lighted up for oh! how many, many years—the picture in the panel opposite the window. It was the portrait of a lady, and at her feet, bending gracefully on one knee, his plumed cap in his hand, knelt a boy, dressed in dark blue velvet, with long curls falling over a pointed lace collar, and in the act of offering a letter to the lady. She was a very beautiful lady,

and in the old catalogue of the pictures which was kept in the Library there was this description:

# " Panel No. 9.

"Portrait of Dame Constantia Aylmer, receiving the news of the gallant defence made by Sir Hugh Aylmer against the rebels after the battle of Naseby, June 1645."

The sunshine caught the page's hair, as it caught little Pearl's, and lingered lovingly upon the face bent down over it—a face on which triumph and pride for her husband's courage was softened by the anxiety for his safety, of which she is apparently asking the page before she reads the letter.

But we must not forget the other letter over which the jewels are bending their heads.

"My jewels," it began, "my little Rosamond and Margaret,—I wish I could come and see you, and I hope I shall do so some day before very long. I hear you are to have a very kind friend to teach you your lessons. Now you must take great pains to learn. Your dear mother could speak German and French, and played and sang beautiful songs. You would like to do all she did, I am sure; so I know you will try hard to get on and be very good girls,

so that cousin Eleanor may write and tell me she has two obedient children ready and willing to learn.

"I should have written before this, but I have been up the country trying prisoners, and there is a great deal of distress and trouble which father has to try and soften.

"Never mind about your blotted letter, my Ruby; I could read it. But I think Pearl had better write in pencil, for she is unlucky in her pens! They do make such funny strokes; and father was rather puzzled by the last. I should not wonder if cousin Eleanor puts you both back to what, when I was a little boy, I called pot-hooks!

"Remember me to old Caleb and Mrs. Bunce; and be sure I am your loving father,

"HUGH AYLMER."

The two little girls kissed the letter again and again, and then they went off to the nursery to get their battledores and skipping-ropes, and had a delightful time of it in the tapestry room, which was at the end of the gallery. There was nothing to touch there, and Sir Ronald Bruce would have been pleased if he could have seen the rosy cheeks and bright eyes of the jewels as they were taught by Ellen to skip—a feat which she had learned with a piece

of rope, with a knot at each end instead of a handle, when she was a little girl.

Battledore was more laborious, and neither Ellen nor the children succeeded in keeping up the shuttlecock more than twice.

At last, tired and happy, they went to their tea in the nursery, where things had brightened with Mrs. Bunce as well as the weather.

Her nap had refreshed her, her faceache was better, and she allowed the children to begin their letters to their father after tea, and advised that both should use pencils to prevent blots.

Sir Ronald Bruce's letter was left till cousin Eleanor's arrival, "as we must take very great pains with that, and say how we like her," said Ruby.

"Well," said little Pearl, "I don't think I shall like her to see how I like her, for I feel I shan't like her at all; and it would not be nice just to say I liked her to please her—that's what Bunny says is sin-sincere."

Poor little Pearl! Like many of us, she was to prove that our best friends come to us like angels, unawares.

## CHAPTER VII.

#### THE GUEST CHAMBER.

As soon as the children were released from the nursery the next morning, they were off to find old Caleb. He was sitting in a wheelbarrow eating his bit of bread and cheese, and received Ruby and Pearl with a nod of his head; his mouth was too full to speak.

"Caleb, we want to know how Ben likes his top; and have you seen the book Sir Ronald sent to Jer? Do you think Will will be vexed because there's nothing for him in the box?"

Will was the young Pidsley who worked in the stables, preferring anything connected with horses to other labour.

"Will has no time to be vexed; not he. The carriage is going out this evening, and he's got something to do for once in his life, he has, and a good thing, too. Them horses will be the better for stirring their stumps a little, it's my belief. We are

all of us the better for work, though when one's getting up in years rest is sweeter than labour."

"Father sent you his kind remembrances, Caleb," Ruby said, drawing a little nearer, and laying her small white hand on the rusty fustian coat-sleeve of her old friend; "and I am sure if you don't want to work any more, father will give you money enough to live without."

"Bless your little heart! I'd like to know what 'd become of these gardens if I gave up. Leave 'em to Jer, eh! A pretty leaving that would be! No, no! I can't quit work yet," Caleb said, half-offended, as he rose from his seat and tried to make the curve of his bent back straight.

"I thought you said you were getting down in years, and wanted rest," Ruby said apologetically. "I thought"——

"Ay, ay, you thinks a good many thoughts, Miss Ruby. So a lady is coming to look after you, is she?"

"Yes,—cousin Eleanor; and we are going to learn everything our mother did," Pearl said proudly.

"I hope you will. I hope you will, Miss Pearl. I remember your dear mamma when she was a little girl, bless her! and when she came here a bride with the young master,—that was before your grandpa died,

you know,—'Caleb,' says she to me one day, 'I'm so fond of gentians, I wish you'd make them grow here, so that when I come home I may find some.' Then the trouble I had with these gentians, they are so shy and particular, but I got them to grow. You know the patch—up by the garden gate—that's the only place where they will flower freely—and I am glad to think your mamma went to that very spot, and called out to me, 'Why, Caleb, Caleb, here are the gentians, numbers of them,' she said, and when she stooped and picked some of them, and put them in her brooch, I thought how they were a match to her eyes. That was the very last time she was here, before you was born or thought of, Miss Pearl."

It was this memory of their mother that bound the children to Caleb, and they were never tired of hearing his stories of her.

"She be gone where the flowers never fade," old Caleb went on, "where my poor girl is gone. I often think it's a mercy she is gone, for Jer and Will are that contrary and tiresome; but now, who would have thought Jer would have been, and left all them bulbs rotting here. Instead of giving him a book, the gentleman had better have given him a bit of his mind—I say."

It is doubtful if a bit of any one's mind could or

would affect Jer. He was one of those boys who thought his own way the best way, and would not put up with what he called "meddling."

Jer was not a good boy, and certainly failed to set an example worthy to be followed by his three younger brothers.

Still, if Jer had a soft place in his heart, it was seen when Ruby and Pearl asked him to do anything for them. Indeed, it is to be doubted whether he would have borne upstairs that big box at the bidding of Samuelson, had it not been addressed to the little ladies, and so in obeying the footman's orders he was serving them.

All the time Ruby and Pearl were speaking to his grandfather, Jer was watching them from his perch of observation on the top of the low wall which divided the kitchen garden from the court yard before the stables. When at last Caleb hobbled away with his hoe over his shoulder, he advanced to the children. Rough and uncouth as Jer was, he had a dim sort of respect for the little ladies, and moderated his tone somewhat when he spoke to them. Also he would give them help in any of their "fancies," as he called them, and had dug a bit of ground round their "hut" in the woods, where they hoped to make some flowers grow, which the sick girl of their imagination or

"make up" might gather when she was strong enough to come out.

"Jer, did you like your book?" the children asked eagerly as he came up to them. "Are there pictures in it, Jer, and stories?"

"It's mostly about gardeners, Miss Ruby, but there are some pictures of fruit and flowers. I say," he went on, "how do you like the thought of a governess? If I was you I wouldn't stand it; she'll be awful hard on you."

"Oh no, Jer," Ruby said confidently; "she is such a nice lady; and she has a little boy of her own."

"Oh! then she'll be for bringing him here; won't he plague you!"

"We wish to have a governess. We wish to be taught music, and French, and everything," said Ruby, drawing herself up; "so you are quite wrong, Jer, to suppose we don't."

"Proof of the pudding is in the eating; but there, you come now into the wood, and see what I have been doing there."

Jer led the way, and little Ben trotted behind, with his top tightly grasped in his hand, but not venturing to speak while his elder brother was near.

Just as the boys were passing Caleb's cottage, they heard his voice.

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"You come in to your meals, or you don't have a bit. What do you mean by bothering the little ladies like this?"

Little Ben, thus appealed to, turned off to his grandfather's cottage, but Jer took no notice whatever of the repeated calls, and strode away before Ruby and Pearl to the wood.

Here Jer had been indulging in some landscape gardening. He had raised some stones for a rockery, he had cut a path in the turf, and had made two crescent-shaped beds, where some slips of geranium and calceolaries had been planted.

"O Jer! this is lovely," Ruby said. "Thank you, Jer. But do go home to dinner now, Jer, because poor Caleb likes you to go; do, Jer."

Jer took off his old straw hat, and stood whirling it round and round, surveying his work.

"Never you mind grandfather," he said. "I'm going to build you a real house next, of sticks, and you'll be able to sit in it,—take your tea in it, shouldn't wonder."

This climax so astonished Pearl that she could scarcely contain her delight.

"O Jer! and you shall have a cup of tea too, and you shall give one to poor Mary Jane."

Jer grinned as usual, and soon after stumped off:

for, contrary as he might be, he was hungry, and odours of bacon and cabbage had been wafted to him as he passed the gardener's cottage.

The children were very happy in their paradise after this, and came back to it again directly Mrs. Bunce allowed them.

On their return to tea they were asked by Mrs. Bunce if they would like to see Mrs. Christian's rooms, "for they used to be your mamma's; so Mrs. Bird says, though it was long before I knew the family." Mrs. Bird was the old housekeeper at the castle, who had seen not only the children's mother, but their father's own mother, come there as a bride. But poor Mrs. Bird was a martyr to rheumatism, and had, moreover, grown so very fat that she could seldom mount the stairs to the nursery.

Mrs. Bunce and Mrs. Bird were not on very friendly terms, or perhaps the children would have paid more frequent visits to the comfortable room where the housekeeper sat surrounded by the deep supboards, where treasures of jams and preserves were hidden, which only wanted people to eat them.

Mrs. Bird was herself in cousin Eleanor's rooms when the children got there. These rooms were in the same wing as the nursery; but at some distance, separated by another long corridor on the upper floor,

like the one below it, and then at the end there was a winding flight of stairs, which led to the three rooms where the children's mother had lived when a little girl on her frequent visits to Castle Aylmer.

Mrs. Bird was waddling about, puffing and panting, smoothing the toilet cover, patting the high feather bed, and rearranging the curtains.

The two rooms were ready, but they did not look home-like; and Mrs. Bird's heavy tread made all the china in the washing-stand shake and the windows rattle.

"Well, my dearies," Mrs. Bird said, "there'll be changes now, so stand prepared. Bless your little hearts, I remember your dear mamma in this very room a child; she was the image of Miss Rosamond. Ah well! we live to see changes! Now suppose you come down along with me, and we'll find a little something for the nursery tea."

The getting down was a very slow process; so was the unlocking of a particular cupboard, and the selection of a pot of real pine-apple jam.

"There," said Mrs. Bird, lifting the cover. "This here jam bears date the year you was born, Miss Margaret, and there is not the leastest atom of mould on the paper; it's just as pure and sweet as the day the pine was cut."

The children were delighted, and were running off with their treasure, when Ruby said—

"I say, Pearl, shall we give it to cousin Eleanor?"

"Perhaps she would not like it," said Pearl doubtfully.

"O Pearl! pine-apple jam is just the very best that is ever made."

"Yes; and I'd rather keep it, and give cousin Eleanor a little taste on her bread for a treat!"

So the coming cousin Eleanor was talked of in Castle Aylmer, and all the while she was on her way to the jewels as fast as the great puffing engine of the Midland Railway could bring her.

# CHAPTER VIII.

#### COUSIN ELEANOR'S ARRIVAL

"Her ladyship was feeling poorly to-night, ma'am, and begged me to say that she had retired early; but she hoped you would take refreshment in the dining-room, or should I order it to be taken to your own apartment?"

This was Benson's greeting to the tall lady who stood in the wide, dimly-lighted hall of Castle Aylmer, with a small travelling-bag in her hand, just as the old clock chimed ten in the tower.

"Thank you," Mrs. Christian said; "I will go to my room at once, and I should like a cup of tea better than anything."

Benson bowed his grey head, and then, his part being done, Samuelson came forward, and taking the bag from Mrs. Christian's hand, preceded her across the hall to the corridor, and at the foot of the staircase handed her over to Ellen, who tripped lightly before her with a silver candlestick in her hand, and after some turns and twists landed Mrs. Christian in her own rooms.

A sitting-room and bedroom opening one from the other; and here was Mrs. Bird, who had panted upstairs to receive the new governess.

"I hope, I'm sure you'll be comfortable, ma'am. Only tea, do you say? I'll send it up at once. The children, little dears, are asleep. I am glad you are come, for I don't think the person in charge of them is at all what my lady thinks. Not that I interfere, but still I do know what's what!"

All this time Mrs. Christian was laying aside her bonnet and jacket, and, going up to one of the windows, opened it.

The night was so still that the two candles lighted on the table did not flicker.

"Do the children sleep near me?" Mrs. Christian asked.

"Oh yes, ma'am, in this wing of the house. You passed the nursery door to the right as you came up-stairs. It is a very rambling place—some parts as old as King John;—the gallery that is, the banqueting-hall under it, and the quadrangle. But there, I won't stay talking, for you look tired. I hope you will sleep well; and good night to you, ma'am."

Soon cousin Eleanor was left alone, and then a great desire possessed her to look at the children asleep. A hungry feeling for the sight of a child's face came over her. She felt so desolate at Castle Aylmer, and a longing for the rough embrace of a pair of strong arms came over her.

Her boy—her Nigel—from whom she had separated herself that she might give him the advantage of a good education—how she craved for a sight of him on this first lonely night at Castle Aylmer. With the quiet, gentle movement, which was scarcely audible, cousin Eleanor crossed the passage, and turning, came to the door on the right of the stairs which Mrs. Bird had mentioned. It was partly open, and as she entered she saw Mrs. Bunce rocking herself to and fro by the fire, which on this hot summer night seemed a superfluity.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you, nurse," cousin Eleanor said with a smile, "but I do so long to see the children. May I look at them asleep?"

Now Mrs. Bunce had drawn herself up with dignity when Mrs. Christian first appeared; she had no fancy, she said to herself, for governesses "prying and peering." But the sweet voice and sweeter smile disarmed Mrs. Bunce. She curtseyed and said graciously—

"You can walk into the next room, Miss, if you please."

The "Miss" slipped out unawares, for Mrs. Bunce had heard the new governess was a widow with one child. It was hard to believe it, however, as she looked on the slight figure, and fair face, and abundant rippling hair which was gathered back from cousin Eleanor's smooth white forehead.

Cousin Eleanor took the candle from the table, and saying, "I will take care not to wake the children," she moved almost noiselessly into the large nursery, where the two little beds stood side by side, while Mrs. Bunce's occupied a space at the further end of the room.

Cousin Eleanor shaded the candle with her hand, and drew near the little sleepers. Not since their mother had bent over them, and given them her last kiss, the night before she went to the hills, had such tender eyes looked upon the Jewels as they slept. Ruby lay calm and still, looking as if she had slept quietly from the moment her head had touched the pillow. The long dark curled lashes lay upon Ruby's round cheeks, and her small hands lay quietly on her breast. Pearl, on the contrary, had tossed about, her pillow was crumpled, and her golden hair was in

a tumbled mass of confusion, having escaped from the two thick plaits in which Mrs. Bunce tied it, as she thought, securely for the night. One of Pearl's little hands grasped something tightly in its fingers; the other was thrown back over her head, and her rosy lips moved.

"Little darling," cousin Eleanor whispered, stooping and kissing the sweet baby-face. Pearl twisted and turned, and still held fast in her hand the precious possession, much tattered and torn, but still the remains of the "company's" letter. The two children had agreed to take it in turn to bed with their father's. Sir Hugh's letter was smooth and safe under Ruby's pillow, while Sir Ronald's was more roughly handled by Pearl's little hands.

Long and earnestly did cousin Eleanor look at each little sleeper, and she prayed to God as she looked that she might do for them what their dead mother would have done, and bring them to the love of Jesus.

"They are two dear children," cousin Eleanor said to Mrs. Bunce, as she returned to the nursery; "thank you for letting me see them. I am afraid your faceache is very bad," she added kindly.

"Yes, ma'am, and I suffer a deal from it. I really am almost frantic at times, and I dare say I am fidgetty and cross to the children. Poor little motherless dears! I am often thinking it is time for me to give up here, for there is no proper mistress; and at my age, and with my experience, it's not likely I am going to put up with an *improper* one, or be ordered about by all the housekeepers in the world! Still, when I think of the fine, handsome gentleman, who turned back to shake hands with me and said, 'You'll take care of my children till I come back,'—why, when I think of him, I feel that I can't leave them."

"Of course you can't," Mrs. Christian said promptly; "you must stay, nurse, and help me to know the children. And now let me tie up your face with this hot flannel, and then you must go to bed and try to sleep."

Mrs. Bunce's heart was gained, and before cousin Eleanor had been a night at Aylmer Castle she had made one friend.

"Are you awake, Pearl?"

Ruby was sitting up in her little bed watching the early rays of the summer sun streaming in through the closed blinds.

But there was no answer from Pearl's bed;—no sound but the regular and rather loud breathing of Mrs. Bunce from her far-off corner.

"Dear me! I wonder what time it is?" Ruby sighed. "I wish the clock would strike. I dare say cousin Eleanor is come, Pearl," and Ruby leaned over and looked at her little sister. Pearl, was making up for the restlessness of last night by the most profound sleep in the morning. Ruby, however, got out of bed, and going up to Pearl tried a variety of expedients to rouse her.

"Don't," and a sleepy murmur was all that Ruby could elicit.

"Pearl, don't you want to see cousin Eleanor? She is come, I know; I dreamed of her last night—she was just exactly like mother. O Pearl! I suppose it's no good," for little Pearl had sunk off again into the soundest sleep.

"There's the clock at last;" and Ruby, sitting on the side of her little bed, counted the strokes of the big clock in the tower. One, two, three, four. Only four! Oh dear me, what shall I do? It will never be time to get up."

And the next thing Ruby was conscious of was Ellen's voice—

"Why, Miss Ruby, what can make you so lazy this morning?—seems as if you wouldn't wake; and there is Miss Pearl up and dressed, and I have called you at least a dozen times. Come, make haste, there's a dear."

## CHAPTER IX.

#### THE NEW COUSIN.

Two demure little maidens stood at the door of cousin Eleanor's room about nine o'clock. Mrs. Bunce told them to knock and wait till the lady said "Come in!" and not rush in like a pair of wild colts.

No fear of that. Shyness, curiosity, and a vague sense of beginning a new phase of their little lives, oppressed the Jewels. The little tap was so faint that it was thrice repeated before the voice said, "Come in!"

Then Ruby turned the large heavy brass handle of the door slowly, and opened it only just wide enough to let her little figure pass through, followed closely by Pearl.

"Here you are at last!" cousin Eleanor said.
"You have given me time to feel settled before you appeared."

The children looked round the sitting-room in

astonishment, everything looked so different to the day before. Cousin Eleanor's books were on one table, which was drawn into the deep bay-window. instead of standing stiffly in the middle of the room. Then the sofa and high-backed chairs were made to look as if they were for use, and were pulled away from the wall. On another table, called by Mrs. Bird the "Nest"—that is, a collection of small tables fitting closely into each other-stood a beautiful photograph in a frame; and altogether the room looked as if it had been quite altered. Then the window was thrown wide open, and the fresh morning air came in, laden with the scent of the newly-cut grass on the terrace slopes and the oldfashioned flowering shrubs which grew below in the garden.

"This is your room as well as mine, children," Mrs. Christian said. "Here I hope we shall be very happy together; and you will be welcome here at all times. Come into my bedroom, and let me show you my boy." The children followed cousin Eleanor hand-in-hand, and looked curiously at a large coloured photograph of a dark-eyed boy of twelve years old, which stood in an upright frame on the dressing-table.

"He's like the boy in our picture," Pearl said;

"he's a very nice boy. Will he come and see us?"

"Perhaps one day. I have sent him to King William's College in the Isle of Man, and he will stay there a long time."

"Is it as far off as India?" Pearl asked.

"Not quite; but the sea rolls between Nigel and me, and he seems very far off. We have a dear old aunt in the Isle of Man, and he is to stay with her till the college opens, and go to her for holidays."

"You are not like what I thought you would be," Pearl said presently; "not a bit. The 'company' told us you were not like other people."

"Who told you?" cousin Eleanor asked, laughing.

"Sir Ronald Bruce. It's only a name we have for him, because Bunny called him 'company.'"

"But, Pearl, you must not call Sir Ronald that name any more."

"Yes, I shall," said Pearl stoutly, "because I like to."

"Are we to begin lessons to-day, please cousin Eleanor?" Ruby asked. "I want to begin."

"I thought we would wait till Monday," cousin Eleanor said. "You know to-morrow will be Saturday, and I think Monday will be the right day to begin. You can get your lesson-books to-day and show them to me."

"We have not many," said Ruby doubtfully.

"There is my history I read to Bunny, and Pearl's 'Words of Three Letters' book and Butter's Spelling-Book, and——— I think that is all."

"But we've lots of story books that we found in the mouse cupboard," Pearl said. "They were my Aunt Lucy's, who died long ago."

"Well, I think I shall ask Lady Aylmer's leave to send for some more books. But to-day you must show me all over the castle and the garden, and"——

"Old Caleb and Jer and Ben!" exclaimed Pearl in an ecstasy; "and our hut, and our mountain, and all our makes-up. And, oh! can you play croquet, and can you skip? We can, and keep up cockshuttle, too!"

"Shuttlecock, Pearl!" Ruby said. "Is it not funny that Pearl always turns words upside down?"

Cousin Eleanor was much amused, and thought what an interesting letter she could write to her Nigel about the children at the castle.

"I suppose we need not do any lessons this morning; we've done with Bunny now, and the work too."

"Oh no! not the work. I should like you to run to the nursery and get your work-boxes, and show me what you are doing; and your Bibles, for I think it will be a good plan if we read the Bible together every morning; and in this I will begin to-day as we mean to go on."

"Oh! but we have only our best Bibles, and we only use them on Sundays," Pearl said. "Bunny keeps them in the drawer of the wardrobe with our best frocks."

"And I don't think Pearl reads well enough to read the Bible," Ruby added.

"Well, I will read to you this morning then," said cousin Eleanor. "Come and sit down."

And then the Jewels drew two chairs up to the table by the window, one on each side of cousin Eleanor, and she opened her own Bible, which little Pearl looked at in wonder.

"It's a very shabby old Bible; isn't it?" she said.
"Ours are all gold round the edges."

"Yes, and our names are on the clasps," Ruby said, adding, "I wish it was Sunday, that we could have them."

"Darling," cousin Eleanor said, in her quiet, clear voice, "the outside of a Bible is of very little

consequence. It is not a Sunday book only, it is the best Book for every day."

I do not think Ruby and Pearl ever forgot the bright summer morning when they sat by the open window with cousin Eleanor, and she read to them from her old shabby Bible the story of the man who, on his journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell amongst thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and left him half dead.

Cousin Eleanor read the story first in the simple, touching words of the Bible, and then she described the country to the children, and showed them, in the little map in her Bible, the three places mentioned in it. Then she told them how the Lord Jesus came to us and pitied us when we were sad and sorrowful, and how we should try to do as He set us the example,—comfort and help all who are sad and sorrowful, and try to lead those who are naughty to be good.

"Like Jer!" Pearl said quickly. "Jer is naughty to poor Caleb, and is so cross to little Ben. I've seen Jer shake Ben till he couldn't breathe!"

"But," said Ruby thoughtfully, "we must try first to be good ourselves. I want to be good," she whispered, "that I may live with mother again in heaven."

Cousin Eleanor was much touched; and closing the Bible, she said—

"We will ask God to help us to do His will;" and then kneeling down, with the children at her side, quiet, wondering, and subdued, cousin Eleanor prayed earnestly for the children, for her own Nigel, and herself, that they might be filled with love, and do God's holy will.

Thus did cousin Eleanor begin her ministry of love at Aylmer Castle, and thus did she bind herself and the little ones in a close, sweet union, which no earthly hand could break.

Everything seemed different to the Jewels now: the restraint put on them was so gentle, yet so firm; the keen interest in all that interested them so delightful and so new to them.

"Talk of widows!" said Mrs. Bunce confidentially to Mrs. Bird, "Mrs. Christian goes running about with the children as if she was a girl."

"And she doesn't look much more, Mrs. Bunce, although she has a son of twelve."

"She must have married very young," Ellen ventured to suggest.

"It's not for servants like you to talk of a lady's marrying young or old; it's very impertinent," said Mrs. Bird.

Ellen was silenced, but thought to herself that if

it was impertinent for servants to discuss their superiors' affairs, Mrs. Bird had set her the example.

Here, there, and everywhere had Mrs. Christian gone with the children on that first bright day. Visited old Caleb; talked to Jer and Ben; gone over to the stables, and looked at the sleek carriage horses "eating their heads off" there, and at the beautifully kept harness-room, where Will Pidsley rubbed and "hissed" when any eyes were on him, and idled and sprawled full length on the ground on a bundle of hay when no one was looking, with a short pipe in his mouth, and his cap tipped up over his eyes.

Will was the most unpromising of the Pidsley race; for rough and ill-tempered as Jer often was, still he had a kindly disposition, and was devoted in his allegiance to the "little ladies!"

Lady Aylmer summoned Mrs. Christian to an interview that first morning, when it was settled that a piano should be hired for the children, and that Mrs. Christian should be allowed to order what books she thought necessary.

"Do not trouble yourself too much with the children, Mrs. Christian; Mrs. Bunce is a very worthy person, and they can be with her sometimes. You will dine with me, I hope, every evening at seven o'clock.

I shall always be glad to see you, and have an hour's conversation afterwards."

Cousin Eleanor hesitated a little. "You are very kind," she said, "but I have been accustomed to dine early for some time." Then she remembered that it would be perhaps ungracious to refuse what was kindly meant, and said she would accept the offer.

"I am sure Sir Hugh would wish you to get everything that you think necessary for the children. My health is so indifferent that I have not been able to see much of them. They are very undisciplined, I fear, and are apt to pitch their voices too high, and they do not move gently. All these things you will correct. And I feel Sir Ronald was right, that you will be very useful to them."

"I hope so," Mrs. Christian said; "they are two such attractive little girls, and the only difficulty will be not to spoil them."

Lady Aylmer looked incredulous.

"You have a son, I understand, of your own."

"Yes; I have a dear boy of nearly twelve. An aunt of my husband's lives in the Isle of Man, and by her persuasion I have sent him to King William's College there. She has very small means, and cannot help me further than by receiving my

boy till the college opens, and by allowing him to go to her house on holidays."

"Sir Hugh will, I am sure, be as liberal as possible about salary," said Lady Aylmer, and then she dismissed the subject of Mrs. Christian's position.

# CHAPTER X.

### LESSONS IN EARNEST.

COUSIN ELEANOR had been scarcely more than a fortnight at Castle Aylmer when Ruby and Pearl felt as if she had always been with them.

The regular times for lessons were established, and gently and tenderly were Pearl's little feet taught to climb the ladder of learning. And, indeed, Pearl was not an easy child to teach. Full of quickness and originality, she had very little steadiness of purpose; and though she would sometimes surprise cousin Eleanor with the speed at which she would learn a hymn or verse of a psalm, she would be slow over the easiest little sum, and would make a great effort to get her own way, and not do it at all.

"Foolish sums, they make me miserable, and I hate them," Pearl murmured one morning when Ruby, looking at the list of lessons written out in

cousin Eleanor's clear hand, read the word "Arithmetic."

"I like sums," said Ruby, "and if you only try, it is easy."

But nothing was easy to Pearl that morning. In the first place, the weather was stormy, and a great deal of rain had fallen. She had a cold, and Mrs. Bunce had desired that she was not to stir out. In fact, Pearl had got out of bed on the wrong side, like Rosamond in the old story book I read when I was a little girl; and everything was in a knot, like the string of that same Rosamond's night-cap. Cousin Eleanor saw the cloud on the little fair face as soon as she sat down to the table, and, like all wise teachers and governesses, she did not make things worse by making any remark till she was obliged to do so. The reading passed off pretty well, and the little lesson to be learned by heart. Then came the copy, and here Pearl took no pains, but scrawled so fast that consin Eleanor took the copy-book away, and said-

"You must not write like that, Pearl; so unless you can do better, you must not write any more. See, now, what a big blot you have made!"

Pearl pouted and kicked her little feet against the leg of the table.

"Don't, Pearl! you shake me! Cousin Eleanor, do tell her she must not do so. She will quite spoil my copy."

"Run into the nursery, Pearl!" cousin Eleanor said, "and ask Mrs. Bunce to lend me her large scissors;" and she whispered—"Leave behind you a naughty little girl that is making you very unhappy to-day."

"I am not unhappy," said Pearl. "Only, I hate sums."

"Run away and fetch me the large scissors, Pearl," cousin Eleanor said. "I want them to cut out this flannel vest for Caleb."

Pearl departed slowly and unwillingly, and returned with the scissors just as Ruby had put away her writing, and was sitting, with a wrapt intent look on her face, over a compound addition sum.

"Now, Pearl," cousin Eleanor said, "you must do a little subtraction sum to-day. See, I have put down 1, 3, 6, and I have put beneath 1, 2, 4. Now, I am going to show you how you are to take the lesser number from the greater—that is, the bottom line from the top."

Quick as thought little Pearl put her forefinger to her lip and then rubbed out the bottom line, saying—"There! I've done it in a minute." Cousin Eleanor could hardly repress a smile, but she did manage to say gravely—"Pearl knows that is not at all what I mean; when I say one from three, how many are left?"

But Pearl twisted and wriggled and pouted, and at last cousin Eleanor led her into the next room, with the slate and pencil, and told her she must stay there till she had found out what was left when one was taken from three.

I wonder if any little girl who reads this story of Pearl's troubles that day can remember a time when she was in like case. If she can, and as we are all determined to get what we call our own way at times, I think it is very likely. And I can only hope that any such little girl may see how foolish as well as wrong such behaviour is, and do her best to overcome her faults, always remembering that God will help her if she asks Him to do so.

That cloudy day made a deep impression on Pearl. She saw that cousin Eleanor, though so gentle, was firm; and it was a very tearful little face that was turned up at last to cousin Eleanor, and a very humble little voice that whispered—

"If I take one from three, it will leave two; and I am so sorry I didn't do it before." Then Pearl was pressed close in cousin Eleanor's arms, and kissed and forgiven and made happy.

Music was Ruby's great difficulty, and yet, as she knew her mother had played and sung, her little heart was set upon learning to do both. But who shall say how weary were the journeys her fingers made over the five-finger exercises and the scale of C! how terrible was the discord of the "Cottage in the Wood" when the wrong note would come instead of the right one in the left hand, and then when corrected the right would go astray!

"I shall never, never learn music," Ruby sobbed on that cloudy day, "it's no use trying."

"Never despair, Ruby!" cousin Eleanor said; "Rome was not built in a day' is an old saying. And now, as it is too wet and cold for you to go out, I propose that we take this afternoon for a good game of shuttlecock in the gallery and a more particular examination of the tapestry room. I must look especially at the bit of tapestry on the right side of the room, for I find in an old book in the library that it was worked by Lady Constantia. If you come into the library now I will show you what I mean."

The Jewels had scarcely ever entered the great dark room, where books were ranged on either side with gloomy precision, and where there was a scent of dead rose leaves, Russian leather, and old parchment; and they followed cousin Eleanor very softly, Pearl hanging behind, half-frightened, and wondering how any one could like to be in a dark room like that.

"Don't stay here, cousin Eleanor," she said, "I don't like it."

"She's afraid of that face in the window, cousin Eleanor. We came in here once with father and a man who was staying here, and he told us it was a room full of 'bogies,' and that man's face in the window was the picture of one."

Cousin Eleanor laughed and said, "Bogies and fairies only live in people's imagination; and as to that ugly face, it is supposed to be the portrait of the man who built the library and the chapel of the castle; and he had a very pretty name if he had not a pretty face—'Bertram Aylmer.'"

"The window is so beautiful," cousin Eleanor said.

"Look at the shape of what we call the tracery, how it forms the *fleur de lis*, the lily flower, and the rose alternately. I know many people who would come a long, long way only to see this grand old library, and would laugh at a little girl for being afraid!" And then cousin Eleanor set the library steps against the

shelves, and stood at the top, reaching up to the highest row of old books, which she could scarcely touch with her long white fingers.

Cousin Eleanor on the steps, and the two little girls looking up at her, made a picture which I am sure many an artist would have liked to paint. For this old room was all of carved oak, and was lighted dimly by the two lancet-shaped windows, with coloured glass filling in the top panes with all sorts of odd figures, arms, and shields, and strange heads, and in the midst of one was the face of Bertram Aylmer. Certainly, he had rather staring eyes and a fierce mouth, but he was, the old records say, a brave knight, and won his spurs when very young.

The sun, when it shone, threw all sorts of lovely colours through the painted glass; but there was no sun on this gloomy day, and all the brightness gathered at the place where Ruby and Pearl stood at the foot of the steps, in their pretty white frocks edged with red, and Pearl's golden locks seemed reflected by cousin Eleanor's deeper shade of hair above her.

"Here it comes, the big, big book! Oh, how dusty!" And cousin Eleanor, calling to the children

to stand aside, came cautiously down the steps, with the big book in her arms.

When it was safely laid on the table, the children drew their little fingers over the dusty calf-skin cover, and cousin Eleanor found a duster on one of the window ledges with which she wiped it, and then, sitting down, opened the thick leaves.

"Why, what funny print!" the children exclaimed, "so black, and I can't read it. Can you read it, cousin Eleanor? There are so many f's; and, look! there is a little bit of painting. Can you read it, cousin Eleanor?"

"I shall have to study it first a little before I can make out the story I want; but I will take it upstairs, and when you are in bed to-night I will see what I can do."

"Will it be a real delightful story?" Pearl asked, "or a dull one like those grandmother gives us to read when we sit in her boudoir—that dull old 'Fairchild Family' for one?"

"The 'Fairchild Family' has made many little girls happy in days gone by," cousin Eleanor said, "and I was one. But I think the story out of this old book will not be in the least like it, so you need not be afraid. And now let us go and play a good

game in the gallery, and then we must pay Lady Aylmer a little visit before her dinner."

"I wish we had some one else to play, because then we could use all four battledores at once, and play two good games. Pearl does drop the shuttlecock so often, it makes my back ache to pick it up."

"I never heard such nonsense, as if your back were stiff like an old lady's! Why, think how far I have to stoop."

And now, as if in answer to Ruby's wish, on this wet dull day, a message came, just as the children were running to get the battledores, from Lady Aylmer.

"Her ladyship wishes to see Mrs. Christian and the young ladies in her room. The rector, Mr. Dacre is there, and a young lady."

"A young lady! how big is she?" asked Ruby, her face flushed with excitement.

"Well, Miss," said Benson, "a trifle bigger than you are, and that isn't saying much."

### CHAPTER XL

#### LUCY.

THE children went with cousin Eleanor to Lady Aylmer's sitting-room, and found there Mr. Dacre, the old clergyman, who was no stranger to them; many a time he had bid them good morning, and asked them if they were growing under the influence of the April showers, or if they had heard from their father, and other questions of that kind, but he never waited for a reply, or listened if they made one. But to-day Mr. Dacre was quite a different person.

"Good afternoon, little ladies," he said, "I have brought my grandchild, Lucy Dacre, to see you, and with your grandmamma's permission she is to stay to play with you this wet afternoon, which will be a very pleasant arrangement for her. Will it not, Lucy?"

All the time Mr. Dacre was speaking the three little girls stood looking at each other, as little girls

generally do look at new companions of their own age when they first meet.

We know very well by this time what Ruby and Pearl are like, with the contrast of their dark and golden hair, and their pretty, little, light, active figures. But we must look, with Ruby's wide, open, astonished eyes, at Lucy Dacre, and see, a very, very fat, little maiden, with hair strained back from a face like a full moon, showing a pair of twinkling dark eyes, a very short, turned-up nose, and a wide mouth, with red lips, which parted to show a row of white though rather irregular teeth.

Lucy wore a black dress and jacket to match, and a black straw hat trimmed with black, set at the back of her head. Her legs were sturdy, and looked capable of bearing the weight of her stout little person, and altogether Lucy Dacre was a great contrast to the Jewels.

"Speak to your little guest, Ruby," Lady Aylmer said, "and make friends."

"How do you do?" said Lucy, making the advance, though crimson with blushes.

"Will you take Miss Dacre upstairs, Rosamond, and tell Bunce she must stay to tea?"

With something between a sigh and a sound like the words, "Yes, grandmother," Ruby obeyed, putting her hand into that of Lucy's, while Pearl took the other.

"My little grandchild is rather awkward," Mr. Dacre said apologetically. "My son's widow has married again," he went on explaining to Mrs. Christian, "and my house seemed the right place for the child, but my daughter and I feel it to be rather a break upon our quiet life."

"Miss Dacre is an invalid, Mrs. Christian," Lady Aylmer said, "and seldom leaves the house. You were saying the other day you thought Rosamond and Margaret would be the better for the companionship of another child, so I am sure we shall be glad to see Mr. Dacre's little granddaughter sometimes."

"You are very good," Mr. Dacre said; "and may I put in a claim for my daughter, who would like to see Mrs. Christian now and then?"

"Indeed, I shall be very glad to come to the rectory," Mrs. Christian said, "and I hope we may be good neighbours."

"Yes, indeed, it is very kind of you," Mr. Dacre said, bowing, and feeling, from some unexplained cause, much more at ease at Castle Aylmer than was usually the case, for Lady Aylmer, though always courteous and friendly, never got beyond a

certain boundary line, nor suffered others to do so either. After a few minutes' pleasant conversation, Mrs. Christian said she must return to the children, and then Lady Aylmer begged her not to hurry, she had no doubt the little people were getting on together very well. But cousin Eleanor said she had promised to play a game of battledore and shuttlecock in the gallery, and she must not disappoint them. As she left the room, Mr. Dacre said—

"What a very charming person Mrs. Christian is!"

"Yes," Lady Aylmer assented; "but she gives herself a great deal of needless trouble about the children. Perhaps, too, it would be a little better for them to have a governess who was more strictly a governess."

Mr. Dacre could only give a sort of compromising assent to this, and no more was said.

"O cousin Eleanor!" the children exclaimed when she appeared, "Lucy can play battledore, and she can skip too and cross her feet, and she does make such a thump thump."

Lucy's figure was certainly not fairy-like and elegant; it was like herself, solid and reliable. The afternoon passed quickly, and then came tea, and then a confidential talk in the nursery while cousin Eleanor was at dinner.

Ruby and Pearl had never had a companion of their own age before, and Lucy's robust frame and downright matter-of-fact nature made her a desirable friend for the Jewels.

After Lucy had paid two or three visits to the castle, Mrs. Christian made up her mind to ask Lady Aylmer's permission for Lucy to come and study regularly with Ruby and Pearl every morning.

"If you think her a nice child, I can have no objection," Lady Aylmer said; "but I am afraid you are taking too much upon yourself, Mrs. Christian."

Cousin Eleanor smiled.

"Oh no! I find my duties only too light and my life here too luxurious," she said. "You are so very kind to me. If I had my boy near me, I should think I was too happy."

"Perhaps you would like to invite him to Castle Aylmer for Christmas. If so, and you are not afraid of the long journey for him, pray do so."

"I do not know if I ought to take him from Aunt Susan, but it is a great temptation, and I will think it over. It is so good of you to propose it. And now, I have one more favour to ask. I do hope you will not think that I encroach on your goodness, but I think a large household like this should be gathered together for prayers morning and evening. If you will give permission, I will read, and I think some of the servants, at least, will be pleased to come."

"Really it is very good of you," Lady Aylmer said rather stiffly. "When Sir Hugh is here he has the gong sounded for prayers. I will give Benson orders to do so at whatever hour may suit you."

"At eight in the morning, if not too early for the household, and at nine in the evening."

"Mrs. Christian gives herself a great deal of unnecessary trouble," Lady Aylmer thought, as she went back to her newspaper; "but she is welcome to please herself; and really I find her a most agreeable companion."

So cousin Eleanor won golden opinions at Castle Aylmer, and, like the sun, brightened everything with her presence. She felt a little nervous for the first two or three times when the servants assembled in the hall, and her sweet voice trembled a little as she began to read. But very soon she was encouraged by the regular attendance of the household; and when at last, after repeated invitations, old Caleb came in with Ben and Jer, and seated themselves on a bench with Will and the groom, she felt repaid for the effort she had made.

Miss Dacre thankfully accepted the offer that Lucy should join the lessons in the schoolroom every morning; and with tearful earnestness said that this proposal had taken a great weight from her mind, for she felt she was in no way capable of teaching Lucy, whose education had been much neglected, and who was very backward for her age. Indeed, at eleven, Lucy was behind most children at nine, and cousin Eleanor soon found that it was a very hard matter to help Lucy up the ladder of learning.

One lovely September morning, after breakfast, when the soft blue haze lay upon the distant hills, and the sunshine came through the trees with a subdued light, Mrs. Christian opened her window and said—

"What a lovely day! Children, we will have a holiday, and go and dine at the Camp. What do you say?"

"Take our dinners! have a picnic! O cousin Eleanor!" the children exclaimed.

"I must get Lady Aylmer's permission first, and then, if she gives it, we must pack up our baskets from Mrs. Bird's store, take Ellen and Jer and Ben, and be off by eleven o'clock." Everything was now in the bustle of preparation. The children went hither and thither, and seized Lucy when she came, and dragged her off to find Jer and Ben; while cousin Eleanor having had a message that Lady Aylmer would be very glad the children should have a day's excursion, went off to consult Mrs. Bird and Mrs. Bunce about the provisions they could carry.

Lucy, who was not given to enthusiasm, or showing much emotion of any kind, was infected with the Jewels' joyousness, and the weight of a French exercise, which she felt was full of mistakes, and which she had brought to cousin Eleanor, was dismissed for that day, and with it the provoking, and, as she thought, stupid irregularities of the verb "aller," with its incomprehensible future tense, which all sensible people would say ought to be "j'allerai!"

"Jer and Ben! Jer and Ben! Put away your spade, Jer, and come directly; we are going a picnic to Cranbury Camp. Make haste!"

But Jer did not seem to share the satisfaction of his little ladies. He stuck his spade into the ground, and, taking off his hat, scratched his tawny head—

- "And you want me to carry all your baskets and boxes; is that it?"
- "O Jer! we want you to be pleased; we want you to like it!" Pearl said, in a disappointed tone.
- "But you are pleased, aren't you, Ben? You must run home and wash your face and put on your Sunday suit, Ben," Ruby said in her practical way. "Only do make haste. Where's Caleb?"
- "Out in the 'sparagus beds," Jer said; "he'll be as cross as two sticks if I go."
- "I'll ask him," said Pearl; "he always does what I ask him." And certainly little Pearl had a wonderful power of making people do what she asked them, old Caleb included.
- "Oh yes! let him go! let him go! he ain't no great loss; and the mowing was all done yesterday. Let him go, and the little 'un too; don't let him get into harm's way, Miss Pearl."
- "We'll take care of him; and we must be all ready in the Court to start at ten o'clock—not a minute later—cousin Eleanor said so. Lucy, is it not delightful?"
- "Yes," said Lucy; "I went a picnic last summer; we had a carriage, though, and a cart to

take our dinner, and there was lots of champagne, and"-----

"Ginger beer?" asked Pearl. "That's the best thing to drink. I like that best."

"I daresay you never tasted champagne," Lucy said, with an air of superior knowledge.

"No, I never did," said little Pearl humbly.

### CHAPTER XIL

#### CRANBURY CAMP.

EVERYBODY was ready as the big clock struck ten. Mrs. Bird had packed two large baskets for Jer to carry, and one large one for Ellen, while the three little girls and Ben had each a small hand-basket, and Mrs. Christian had a bag, in which were a table-cloth and some glasses, and knives and forks.

Such a happy party they were, going out in the soft September sunshine, and so Mrs. Bunce thought as she stood under the quaint stone gateway of the quadrangle, shading her eyes with her hand, and watching her children with some pride.

Dear little Pearl ran back and said—"Bunny, dear, I wish you were going," lifting up her face for a kiss.

"Oh no! my dear. I've something else to do than go picnics. I've your blue serge frocks to finish making, bless your hearts! I hope you'll enjoy yourselves; and don't go and tear your dress to ribands." Then, with a final smooth down of the fair golden locks, Mrs. Bunce let the child run after the others.

"She is a winning little thing, that she is," Mrs. Bunce sighed out. "There's something in her no-body can get over; she has given me ten times the trouble Miss Ruby has, and yet there's no denying I love her the best; though, if I was put to it, I should not know which of them to part with." And with these reflections Mrs. Bunce turned back to the empty nursery, and enjoyed the unbroken quiet which now reigned there.

Meanwhile the walking party were making their way through the village, and as they passed the vicarage a voice was heard from behind the laurel hedge—

"Where are you all off to this fine morning?"

"We are taking a holiday, and are going up to Cranbury Camp, Mr. Dacre," cousin Eleanor said. "Will you come with us?"

"I will come and meet you," Mr. Dacre said, "and help you to carry back the empty baskets. We will put Miss Pearl into that big one, and swing her across my back; you know it is a good two miles up to the camp, and a stiff pull."

"Oh yes! I know," Mrs. Christian said gaily;

"but we are going to take our time, and have a good rest when we get there, and a good dinner, I hope."

"Do come and meet us, grandpapa," Lucy said.

"Very well, about four o'clock, I suppose? You must remember that the days are closing in early now, and this long, bright summer is coming to an end."

"It does not feel like it to-day," cousin Eleanor said, "it is so warm and delicious."

The way up to the camp lay through bowery lanes, where the traveller's joy, the small white clematis, was making the hedges white and fragrant, black-berries were beginning to ripen, and the higher branches were laden with clusters of deep ruby-coloured fruit, amongst which two or three black ones glistened.

A little stream was singing its happy song as it came down from the hill, and the pretty pink wild geranium still blossomed by its brink, and many of its leaves were changed into the deepest crimson.

The way through the narrow lane, with its high hedges, was rather long, and Pearl was glad to take cousin Eleanor's hand just for a little help over the rough, uneven path. Then, nearly at the end of the lane, the party turned in at a gate leading to a grassy slope, up which the children skipped like so many lambs, and the skylark sang above their heads in the

overarching sky of tender blue, and cousin Eleanor felt, if her boy were with her, she should have nothing left to wish for.

At last the camp was reached, and Lucy looked round her in astonishment.

"Why, I thought the camp was full of tents and soldiers. I went to the camp at Wimbledon," she said. "Is this a camp?"

Then cousin Eleanor told her to look round at the circular ridge of turf which rose some feet above the level of the down, and told her that it was the remains of an old Roman encampment of which there were many left in England, and which had been grown over by the lapse of time, and left only the outline of the original place.

"Now, you may play about as much as you like," cousin Eleanor said, "while Ellen and I get the dinner ready; then when you are tired, you can sit still, and I will try to tell you the story that I found in the old black letter-book in the library the other day."

"Oh! that will be nice—everything is nice to-day."
Pearl said, as she skipped away.

Jer waited behind with Ellen to unpack the baskets, but little Ben went with the three little girls, and trudged along in silent contentment.

Presently he broke the silence by saying-

"This be a musheroom, there's heaps of musherooms about the camp."

"Oh! let us gather them," Ruby said; "we'll take them home for Caleb's supper—here is a big one."

"That's not one," said Ben, "that's a toady."

"A what?"

"A toady-smell it."

"Yes, it does not smell like the other one," said Lucy; "throw it away, Pearl; look how nasty it is."

"We'll just run down the side of the hill, and see whether there is a path into the wood," said Ruby, "and perhaps we shall find some more mushrooms."

But Pearl was tired, and preferred sitting down on a bit of lime-stone which cropped up out of the turf, and Ben stretched himself by her side.

Pearl sang to herself, as was her custom, a little rippling song, like that of the brook, and composed of fragments of many hymns and verses, strung together without any distinct purpose.

"Ben, have you learned that little hymn cousin Eleanor tried to teach you last Sunday?"

"No, Miss," said Ben stolidly, "I can't get it by heart, nohow."



"Pearl was glad to take cousin Eleanor's hand, just for a little help over the rough, uneven path."—Page 96.



"O Ben! and it is so easy; try now. We are on a green hill now, and it will come quite easily.

"There is a green hill far away, Without a city wall"——

"There isn't no city wall," said Ben.

Pearl was rather at a loss, but she said-

"You can fancy Jerusalem down there, in the wood—you can fancy, can't you?"

"No, Miss," Ben said again, "I can't."

"O Ben! I fancy so many things. I always fancy mother is up there in that blue sky, and when I see the big white clouds, I think of the gates of the city where the white angels watch and take care of every one. Your mother is there, too, Ben; wouldn't you like to see her? Perhaps she has seen our mother, and perhaps she is glad cousin Eleanor has come to take care of her little Ben as well as of us."

"But mother wasn't a lady," said Ben; "how should she know yours, Miss?"

Pearl hesitated, then said-

"Why, just as Mrs. Bird knew her here; besides, I don't think it is quite the same when we are up there, but I don't know; only do learn the hymn, Ben, for it tells about the only One who can unlock the gate of heaven and let us in. Come, Ben."

Ben, thus appealed to, sat upright, and, with an unusual effort, began—

# "There was a green hill far away, Without no city wall;"

"Without a city wall," corrected Pearl.

"Look, Miss Pearl! did you ever see such a big bumblebee?"

"No, it is a beauty. 'Oh, velvet bee, you're a dusty fellow; you have powdered your wings with gold.' But see, Ben, there is Jer waving to us and calling us. Dinner must be ready—where are Ruby and Lucy?"

The two children now appeared, Ruby exclaiming—

"There is such a beautiful lake in the wood down there; we saw it shining through the trees, sparkling and glittering."

"It's only a pond," said Lucy, who was very matter of fact; "but it looks very pretty. Oh dear! I am so tired and so hungry."

The little dinner was set out to great advantage, and looked very tempting. There was cold chicken and salad, and sandwiches, and apricot jam puffs, and some of Mrs. Bird's thin wafer biscuits. And there was lemonade and ginger beer, and some sub-

stantial slices of beef for Jer, whose appetite never failed, and who sat in the most unconcerned way, eating not only the beef provided for him, but the remnants of the entire feast.

"Now," said cousin Eleanor when they had all finished, "shall we move away to the further side of the camp and rest a little there before we explore the wood?"

"Oh yes, cousin Eleanor; and perhaps you'll tell us the story that you have promised so long."

"I am quite ready," cousin Eleanor said; "we will begin as soon as we are settled in a nice resting-place. Let us cross over to the other side of the Camp, while Ellen and Jer clear away the things. The old Romans had a good view of the country round," cousin Eleanor continued, "and it must have been a clever enemy to surprise them at this high point. Look how far we can see all round; and here is the clock tower of the castle right under us in the valley, and there is the wood on the other side, and then there is the long level plain over which the page ran with the news to Lady Constantia."

"That will be the story, won't it? Oh, let us begin, please, cousin Eleanor."

Comfortable seats were found at last, right over

the wood, where the tops of the trees were glimmering with gold, and the soft blue haze of the September day wrapped them in a dream-like beauty, and cousin Eleanor began her story.

#### CHAPTER XIII.

#### DAME CONSTANTIA.

"THE Lady Constantia Aylmer was the wife of Sir Hugh Aylmer," cousin Eleanor began.

"Is it a 'make-up?'" Pearl asked, "or a real history? It's a real name."

"Well," cousin Eleanor said, "it is fiction founded on fact, Pearl. I have found more about the little page than appears in the catalogue of the pictures, and I am going to tell you his supposed story in a connected form."

"I understand," said Lucy; "a story like Sir Walter Scott's."

Cousin Eleanor laughed.

"Like and unlike. Come nearer, Jer, if you want to listen, and Ellen too, for my voice will not reach you so far off."

Ellen drew near and settled herself into an attitude of attention. Jer threw himself down on the short turf, with a bit of grass between his lips and his cap well over his eyes.

The little girls were all clustered round cousin Eleanor, and little Ben was rolled up into a ball near them.

"You may suppose, children," cousin Eleanor began, "how frightened every one in England was when the news of the war between the king and Parliament reached them.

"Our little village of Aylsford was all astir, and the country people flocked in to see the departure of the brave knight, Sir Hugh Aylmer, with a number of squires and attendants, as he passed out from under the stone archway of the quadrangle to fight for his king and his country. The Lady Constantia, or Dame Constantia, as she would then be called, stood on the terrace to see the train ride away.

"Her face was very pale; but she did not allow herself to weep, but waved her handkerchief and murmured—

"'God speed them; I pray God to keep them safe.'

"Nearest to her stood a woman much older than herself, who broke out into sobs as the last glitter of arms was hidden by the trees of the park.

- "Dame Constantia turned, and putting her arm round the weeping woman, said—
- "'Nay, Margaret, do not weep! They are gone forth in a good cause, and God will protect them. Your boy is under His care without whose leave not a sparrow falleth; and he is a brave boy with a stout heart, and Sir Hugh will be kind to him as to his own son.'
- "'Ah! lady, he is the only son of his mother, and she is a widow. I would he had been content to live at home and serve you in the castle, instead of going into a fight which maybe is not lawful. Some say one thing, some another.'
- "'Whatever is said, Mrs. Jocelin,' said the lady, 'and by whomsoever it is said, one thing remains certain, that it is not for us to rebel against the king the Lord's anointed. But take heart, Margaret, and believe that we shall see your boy ride home with his master, safe and sound.'
- "But many, many months passed, and still the hearts of those who were at home ached with anxiety for those who were away. Battle after battle was fought; sometimes the king triumphed, sometimes his gallant soldiers were defeated. Once during these long years, Sir Hugh Aylmer came

home, and there were tears shed for some of his brave retainers who had fallen in the righteous cause.

"Meanwhile, Margaret Jocelin's boy remained firm in his allegiance to his master, and was so bright and cheery and well that his mother began to be less fearful about him, and to be proud that he should be praised and loved by his master, Sir Hugh.

"One beautiful evening in June, when the sky was one perfect arch of lovely blue, when the birds were singing and the flowers sending up their sweet scent to heaven, a terrible battle was just over between those who ought to have been bound together by ties of brotherly love, as they often were by the ties of family and kindred.

"Two figures might have been seen on a hill-side under some furze bushes which grew thickly all round.

"'The news of this defeat will spread over the country like wild-fire, my brave boy,' Sir Hugh Aylmer was saying. 'Would that I could let my wife know I have escaped, for this wound is not dangerous; it is but a scratch; and if I could lie quiet for a few days, I should be well. Meantime, she will think I am dead.'

"'When I have seen you safe, dear master,' said

Hubert Jocelin, 'I will take the news to the castle. I can find my way, nobody can hurt me, and I can set our lady's mind at rest, and my poor mother's also. Ah! what a thrust that was you had from that canting, bull-headed hypocrite.'

"'Hush, Hubert! No railing. The men thought they did well. But I thank God our resistance saved his Majesty, for had those half-dozen men pursued they might have got on the right tack, and Fairfax would have got round and stayed the royal reserve from flight. Let us thank God for His mercy, and not rail, dear boy. How thou did'st stand by me and parry the blows! A stout heart, verily, is under thy fair girlish face. Nay, do not be angry, Hubert; thou art made for a page.'

"'I am thy esquire now,' the boy said; 'I am fifteen. But come, dear master, let us make for that cottage where a light twinkles. I feel sure the people will be friendly.'

"With slow and painful steps, Sir Hugh and his faithful page made their way across the common, and, to their great joy, came upon a party of Sir Hugh's own men, from whom they had been separated, or rather cut off, by the attack of the little band of Ironsides, as Cromwell's men were called.

"The people at the lonely farm proved friendly. Sir Hugh was taken in, and his wound dressed and cared for, and food provided for the men.

"Sir Hugh managed to scrawl a few words with the point of his dagger dipped in some charcoal and water, and tied it round with the fringe torn from his scarf.

"The men about him slept heavily after their hard day's work; but Hubert was wide awake.

"'I have written the letter, boy,' he said; 'but when morning dawns, Simon Carlton and Andrew Norman will start with thee. It is a long march, some thirty miles; but Simon knows where two of our horses may be met with. I shall sleep now, and do thou the same.

"But the boy had no such intention, he waited till all was quiet, then picked his way over the prostrate forms of the tired and weary soldiers, who lay upon the floor of the farm-house kitchen, and then sped away over hill and dale, narrowly escaping observation in the dawn of the fair June day, and never resting for more than a few minutes at a time, answering the few questions put to him by the people civilly and courteously, and in return getting information as to his road. "It was the evening of the next day when the faithful page saw the old clock tower of the Castle come in sight, and as he neared the gate, he saw Dame Constantia on the terrace quite alone.

"It had been a hard run for Hubert, and he was all but exhausted, but he pressed bravely on, the precious letter in his hand, his abundant gold-coloured hair hanging loose and uncombed, his violet doublet and hose were travelstained, the long plume of his cap limp and ragged.

"Hubert climbed the stone steps at the end of the terrace before Dame Constantia saw him.

"'Lady!' he exclaimed, to attract her attention; but she was lost in thought, and anxieties, and troubles, so that he had to speak twice before she turned her head.

"'Hubert! what news?"

"The boy knelt at her feet and presented the letter, saying—

"'My master is safe, wounded, but slightly, and he bid me give you this with his love and duty, and'——

"But the page's voice failed here. He sank down at Dame Constantia's feet insensible, and lay for many days between life and death." "But he got better, cousin Eleanor? Pray say he did!"

"Yes, Ruby; and that picture in the gallery was painted at Lady Constantia's request to represent him kneeling at her feet."

"But in the picture he does not look one bit tired," Ruby said.

"And the violet tunic looks so fresh and no spots on it," said matter-of-fact Lucy; "but it is a pretty story; do go on, Mrs. Christian."

"You may be sure Hubert did not go unrewarded. He was of gentle blood, and married, I see in the old records, when he grew to be a man, a niece of Sir Hugh Aylmer's, and founded the family of his name, whose portraits hang in the little ante-room."

"How many children had Lady Constantia?" Lucy asked.

"Only one son, born on the very day when the king was beheaded. He was a Hugh Aylmer also, and had a great many children, a Rosamond and Margaret amongst them."

"Everything here is like a story," Lucy Dacre said. "It is very different to living in a street with a lot of houses all round you, where nobody ever lived that you care to hear about."

"Yes, it is different," cousin Eleanor said; "but we must not forget, Lucy, how many of God's bravest and best servants, who have run a more difficult race than Hubert Jocelin, have lived in crowded cities or lonely villages, and have died, leaving no name behind, but have their names written in God's Book, for deeds of love and unselfishness of which He only knew. Jer, and Ben, too, may run as good a race as Hubert, if they will only try."

Jer did look so very unlike the page in the picture at this moment, that Ellen joined the children in a laugh.

"Poor old Jer!" said little Pearl, drawing nearer to the big awkward limbs that were stretched out on the turf. "Poor old Jer! I know he would run to tell me about father; wouldn't you, Jer?"

Jer grunted. But the sweet, trusting, child-like faith in him did him good.

Jer felt at that moment the sweetness of being believed in, and when Pearl repeated, "Wouldn't you, Jer?" he muttered—

"I'd do anything to serve you, Miss Pearl, anyways."

After this rest the party all went to visit the

woods where the lake lay hidden of which Lucy and Ruby spoke, and then, laden with treasures of moss and fern, and wreaths of clematis, with which they filled the empty baskets, they began to turn their steps homeward.

### CHAPTER XIV.

#### A LITTLE WANDERER

Mr. DACRE met the children as he had promised, and took poor, tired, little Pearl in his arms, for her progress over the rough, uneven ground of the lane was very slow.

"Jer," Pearl called, looking over Mr. Dacre's shoulder, "you've only got empty light baskets to carry; do let Ben get on your back; he must be just as tired as I am."

Ben was astonished indeed when Jer paused, and stooping, said in his rough way—

"Climb up, youngster, and don't throttle me."

The kindly act was not graciously done, but it was one of poor, rough Jer's steps in the right direction. The story of the devoted page had sunk into Jer's heart, and he thought, perhaps for the first time in his life, that service was something to be proud of, and not the mere drudgery which he had been wont to consider it.

The party all went in to tea at the Vicarage, and Miss Dacre, lying on her sofa in a corner, watched the children at the table with great interest.

It was new to her to live out of herself. I mean, she had been so engrossed with her pains, and her weary confinement to the sofa, that she had not thought much of others. Her little niece's arrival had been looked upon as a grievance, but it was to prove a great blessing.

Lucy's visit to the castle had brought Mrs. Christian to the Vicarage, and her bright, cheerful spirit had come to the poor invalid, like a breath of refreshing air, and was to prove a wholesome stimulus to her.

Soon after the beautiful day at Cranbury Camp, the weather changed, and autumn set in with cold chilling winds, which chased the yellow leaves from the trees, and gave Caleb and Jer, and even little Ben, plenty of work to sweep them from the terrace. Ruby and Pearl recalled the dark short days of the winter previous, and sighed to think that the sunshine and the flowers were over, and that they should have to spend many days, or parts of many days, in the house.

Cousin Eleanor, however, left no time for lamen-

tations; she had a wonderful power of keeping every one busy and happy, and was never at a loss how to do so. Ever since she had come to Castle Aylmer, cousin Eleanor had taken a class in Mr. Dacre's Sunday School, and as the evenings closed in, she thought it would be so nice to have a few of the best-behaved big boys about the place, twice a week, for reading and writing and arithmetic, in one of the many unused and empty rooms at the Castle.

As soon as Lady Aylmer's permission was given, Mrs. Christian opened the subject to Benson, who was, in fact, the master of most things at Castle Aylmer.

Lady Aylmer gave consent in her usual manner. If she was not disturbed, and if Mrs. Christian did not mind the trouble, she could make any arrangement she pleased.

The great Benson, however, and Mrs. Bird were more difficult to manage.

"Think of the dirty boots of those clodhoppers, Mrs. Christian, while it will take a day to clean up after them."

"But we will get a big scraper and two big mats, Mrs. Bird, and we will make it a rule that the boots must be clean."

"And when you have done it," Mr. Benson said,

"they won't say 'thank you,' and a lady like you will find them roughish customers. As to those Pidsleys, the coachman's patience is worn out at last, and Will is to be sent about his business."

"Will will do better in another place. There is not employment enough for him here. I am very glad he is going away; but can I have the room opening from the Quadrangle on the left hand side, and may I do what I like with it?"

Benson thought people had strange tastes to "meddle and make" with a set of ignorant country fellows, but he was too polite to say so, and Mrs. Christian found herself in full possession of the room, which was like every other part of the castle, a quaint and uncommon one.

There was a very big, open hearth, where in imagination Mrs. Christian saw a pile of wood burning, and there was a curious carved panelling half way to the arched ceiling, and two deep mullion windows with stone window sills.

When once fairly in possession of the room, Mrs Christian looked round to see what she wanted, and one pleasant November day she told the children they should come with her to Cranworth, and help her to buy all she wanted for the room.

This was indeed joyful news, and when the two fat carriage horses went off at a sober trot with the big old-fashioned landau behind them, filled with happy little faces, cousin Eleanor felt that she had thought of something that would have an interest for them all.

To go into Cranworth was in itself a great treat to the Jewels. Their visits there were few and far between, and Lucy Dacre, to whom the neighbourhood of London was familiar, was astonished at the delight with which Ruby and Pearl looked at the shops.

The carriage was put up at the largest inn in Cranworth, and then cousin Eleanor took out her list of commissions, which was a very long one, and took them first to a large linendraper's shop for some red baize, some brown holland and tape; to a book-seller's for copy-books and slates; and then to the depôt of the Christian Knowledge Society for a frame with lines of beads to count, some pictures, and texts with big print. By the time all this was done the children were tired—more tired than they liked to confess—and Mrs. Christian took them to a confectioner's shop; here they had coffee and buns, and, quite refreshed, were ready for anything.

On the way from the depôt of the Christian Knowledge Society to the confectioner's they passed a toy shop, in which were big dolls with long faces and black eyes, and hair cut short on the forehead, and kites, and balls, and every kind of toy.

"I think," little Pearl said in a whisper, "I think if the 'company' were here he would buy lots of these things; but the only thing I wish for is a kite—I should like a kite for Ben."

The wish grew and strengthened, as wishes commonly do when they are not dismissed from the mind as vain, and as Pearl finished her bun she said aloud—

"I wish I had a kite for Ben; the one with the funny face, like the man in the moon."

A gentleman sitting close by, at another of the little, round, marble tables, looked up as he heard Pearl's wish, which was sighed out with great fervour.

"It is a pity you can't have a kite," he said; "for you could tie a message to the tail, you know, and send it up to its first cousin, the man in the moon."

Pearl looked at the stranger with her blue eyes wide open, and said—

- "I don't want the kite for myself; it is for Ben."
- "Will this buy it?" the stranger asked, holding out half-a-crown.
- "Oh! thank you," Pearl said; "I have got sixpence already, and I expect that is more than enough."
- "Well, never mind; take this to your friend Ben, with my compliments, and buy the kite or not, as you like. Only, I say! don't let the kite take you up with it to the moon, you know, as happened to that little boy in the German tale."

The old gentleman laughed a merry laugh, and Pearl, slipping down from her horse hair chair, went up to him and said in her pretty way—

"Thank you, I shall be so glad to buy the kite, and something for Jer too."

But here Mrs. Christian interposed.

- "Pearl, my darling, you must not accept the gentleman's kindness; Lady Aylmer would not approve of your doing so."
- "Oh! these are Lady Aylmer's grandchildren, I suppose," the old gentleman said.
- "Make my compliments to your grandmamma, Miss Pearl, and tell her Mr. Heathcote hoped she was well; and express to her my sympathy that

her little grandchild should run the risk of being carried up to the moon, with a message to the old man who lives there. Come, take the half-crown."

Pearl hesitated, and seeing cousin Eleanor's grave look, and hearing a whispered, "No, Pearl," she went back to her seat, her face covered with blushes, and her eyes dim with tears.

Cousin Eleanor paid for the luncheon at the counter, and then calling the children to follow her, she left the shop, Ruby by her side, Lucy and Pearl following. The half-crown still lay on the little marble table, and Pearl looked at it with longing eyes, but the old gentleman was now engrossed with reading the paper, and did not look up as the children passed him.

"O Lucy! I wish I had it," Pearl said; "if he is a friend of grandmother's, why should he not give me something as well as the 'company'? And Ben would be so pleased to have the kite."

Mrs. Christian turned at this moment, and said, "Come, children, take care of Pearl; Lucy, Ruby, and I, are going into the chemist's for two or three minutes."

The chemist's shop was on the other side of the

street, and Mrs. Christian had Ruby's hand in hers, while Lucy and Pearl stood irresolute.

The omnibus was rolling up from the station, and cousin Eleanor signed to the children to stay where they were.

"I shall not be long," she said; "stay where you are, and wait for me and Ruby."

Quick as thought, when Mrs. Christian and Ruby disappeared into the chemist's shop opposite, Pearl ran back to the confectioner's; Lucy was at that moment occupied with staring at a little girl on a pretty chestnut pony, which was frisking about somewhat more merrily than the little girl approved, and the groom, hastening up behind, the pony only reared and twisted and kicked more persistently. A baker's cart rattling up added to the disturbance of the pony's nerves, and just as the groom had caught the rein, the child was thrown upon the pavement, and narrowly escaped the hoof of the larger horse striking her head. She jumped up quickly, however, and was quite brave, and said she was not one bit hurt, and that it was no consequence at all.

A crowd collected, as crowds will always collect in a street, if there is any accident: the chemist from the shop opposite came running out with sal volatile; and a kind linendraper with a glass of water; and there were a great many questions, and very few answers, and all was confusion and hurry, and Mrs. Christian and Ruby made their way up to the place where Lucy was pushing her stout little person forward, to get a good view of the pony and its rider.

"Come, Lucy and Pearl, we must be going back to the hotel, and get the carriage. We must be quick, for there are all the parcels to pack away. Come, Lucy—and Pearl, where is Pearl?"

Lucy started, she had forgotten all about Pearl.

"Where is she?" cousin Eleanor asked. "Lucy, why don't you speak?"

"I think—I think—I don't know, but I think she went back to the confectioner's."

"How could you allow her to leave you? it was excessively wrong," cousin Eleanor said, looking round her anxiously, and speaking more sharply than Ruby ever remembered to hear her.

Then she went quickly back to the confectioner's, which was a corner shop with an entrance in two streets. Mrs. Christian went in hastily and looked round. There were the marble tables, with the

empty plates and the crumbs, but nothing was to be seen of Pearl and the old gentleman.

The smart young ladies in the shop, in reply to Mrs. Christian, said they had seen one of the young ladies come in, and that she just looked round, and went out at the opposite door, without asking for anything, and that was the only information gained at the shop.

## CHAPTER XV.

#### PEARL'S WANDERINGS.

Where was Pearl? She had darted away from Lucy Dacre towards the confectioner's, and running into the shop, she saw to her surprise that the old gentleman and the half-crown were gone. The door into the other street was standing wide open, and without a thought, Pearl covered with confusion, as she saw the eyes of all the smart young ladies fixed upon her, rushed out of it, and ran down the street, the same street, as she believed, as the one where she had left Lucy Dacre.

Lucy was not there, however, and Pearl got bewildered. There was the chemist's shop, as she thought, where cousin Eleanor and Ruby had gone, and Pearl ran over to it, narrowly escaping an advancing cab as she did so, the man calling out a loud "Halloo there," which nearly made her cry.

"Oh! I wish I'd never come! Oh dear! where

are they?" and little Pearl, seeing the chemist's shop empty, ran along wildly now, scarcely knowing where.

Presently she heard a voice calling her, but this time not with the rough "Halloo" of the cab driver, but a kind, cheery voice. It came from a gentleman on a stout, steady-going horse.

"Little lady, what's the matter?" for poor Pearl, utterly confused and bewildered, was crying and sobbing bitterly.

"I am lost! I am lost! I can't find cousin Eleanor nor Ruby."

"Well, well, Cranworth is not such a big place as London," said the old gentleman; "we'll soon find your friends—why, dear me!" he said, dismounting, "if you are not Lady Aylmer's little granddaughter I made friends with not half an hour ago!"

And Pearl looking up, saw the "half-crown gentleman," as she called him in her own mind.

"Here, hold my horse, boy," Mr. Heathcote said; "and now, my dear, don't cry, we will soon find your cousin and sisters. Come, come, don't cry "said Mr. Heathcote, taking out of his pocket a very large, yellow, silk pocket-handkerchief, with white spots on it, and trying to wipe Pearl's tears with it.

"Come, don't cry; why, I'll take you to Castle Aylmer myself if the others don't turn up. What were you about to leave them?"

"I—I wanted to find you again," Pearl said, getting confidential. "I went back to the shop where we had our buns to find you."

"Now, upon my word, I am flattered; so now you have found me it is all right."

"But," said poor Pearl, stammering and hesitating, and squeezing the old gentleman's hand very tight, "but, I was naughty; cousin Eleanor told me not, but I did wish to get Ben that big kite."

"You shall have twenty big kites if you wish."

"Oh no, no, thank you," Pearl said; "I mustn't—oh no!"

"You are a funny little lady. At what inn did your carriage put up?"

"I don't know," said Pearl, "I forget. Oh! pray do take me to cousin Eleanor and Ruby."

Mr. Heathcote trotted along with Pearl at his side, and just at the corner of the confectioner's shop there stood cousin Eleanor! Her face was very pale, and when she saw Pearl she gave a great bound towards her, which showed how frightened she had been.

"O Pearl, Pearl! where have you been?"

"How naughty of you!" Lucy exclaimed; "it is all said to be my fault."

"O Pearl! darling Pearl!" was Ruby's greeting; and then she began to mingle her tears with her little sister's.

"Come, come," said Mr. Heathcote, "don't all of you dissolve in tears; I am the only person to blame, so I beg this good lady will scold me, and no one else; and I beg to escort you to your carriage, and I mean to buy the biggest kite that was ever made, as we pass the shop."

But cousin Eleanor said "No." She thought Pearl did not deserve it, and that her running off from Lucy to get what she had been forbidden to have, was disobedience, which ought to be punished and not rewarded.

"But it is for her brother, not for herself, I understand."

Mrs. Christian could not help smiling.

"No, it is for the gardener's little boy; Pearl has no brother. We all thank you very much for your kindness, Mr. Heathcote," Mrs. Christian said, "and now we must hasten homewards; we are very late."

"Let me see you into your carriage then," Mr. Heathcote said; "and I shall hope to be allowed to

call at Castle Aylmer before long and see my little friend."

At last the children were safely packed into the carriage with all the parcels, and then, with good-byes to Mr. Heathcote, the fat horses shook themselves into a trot, and even pricked their ears, as if in appreciation of the fact that they were going back to their comfortable stable and their abundant corn for another week, or it might be a fortnight.

The returning party were not as joyful and merry as when they set out in the morning.

Pearl knew she had been wrong, and Lucy Dacre, although she excused herself to herself, knew she ought not to have lost sight of Pearl in a crowd like that which had collected round the pony and its little rider. Ruby could not be happy if Pearl was miserable, and very miserable Pearl looked, I assure you.

There was no counting of the cows, and geese, and people they passed on the road. Even that wonderful piece of good fortune, "a cat looking out of a window," was passed unnoticed.

The even trot trot of the horses' feet was listened to in a silence which cousin Eleanor did not break. The short day was closing in when the carriage at last drove up to Castle Aylmer, and parcel after parcel was lifted out. Lucy Dacre did not come in to tea, but after a grave good-bye went off to the Vicarage, and Ruby and Pearl went slowly upstairs.

Mrs. Bunce met them with an exclamation-

"How late you are, my dears! You must be tired out."

And then Pearl threw herself into Mrs. Bunce's arms, and let her tears have their way.

"I was naughty," she sobbed, "and I got lost, and I was frightened, and cousin Eleanor is angry."

"Not angry, Pearl," said Ruby; "she's only sad; for I saw she was nearly crying as we drove home."

"You shall have your tea and go to bed, my precious," said Mrs. Bunce, who was full of sympathy now that Pearl was in a manner out of her jurisdiction. "It don't answer to take children into towns that are brought up as you are. Come now, don't cry, and I'll make you a cup of cocoa with a spoonful of cream—only, don't cry like that."

Pearl allowed herself to be comforted after this, but how she did wish cousin Eleanor would come. Just as Pearl was sinking off to sleep that evening she heard a gentle voice near her—a voice she knew well—

"Pearl, little Pearl, are you asleep?"

Then Pearl sprang up in the bed and threw her arms round cousin Eleanor's neck, and was folded close in her arms as she whispered—

"I am so sorry, cousin Eleanor; please forgive me."

Then when cousin Eleanor had kissed her many times and told her that she was forgiven, little Pearl lay back on the pillow contented, but as her heavy eyelids closed, she murmured—

"May I save up my pennies, and buy Ben a big kite?"

Before cousin Eleanor could reply, Pearl had crossed the border into dream-land, and her gentle breathing showed she was sound asleep.

I feel sure many children who read this story about Pearl can recall many acts of disobedience and naughtiness, when it was so sweet to be sorry and to be forgiven—sweet to hear a gentle voice whisper words of tenderness and hope, and to feel that the love of their dear mother is the same. Whatever we have done, that cannot change!

And if the forgiveness of one we love on earth is sweet, how much sweeter is the thought of One Who pities us as a father pities, Who loves us in all our waywardness, and Who longs that we may give Him our hearts and find rest unto our souls!

# CHAPTER XVI.

## COUSIN ELEANOR'S CHRISTMAS SECRET.

One afternoon just before Christmas cousin Eleanor and the children were very busy in the room, for which so many preparations had been made in the autumn.

What with pictures bound with scarlet tape, and maps, and texts with pretty flowers, and a big fire on the hearth, and red baize curtains over the high windows, covering the bare stone walls, the room no longer looked desolate and "miserable," as Mrs. Bird had called it, but very comfortable and habitable.

The first evening that the Pidsleys and some halfdozen other boys clattered down the stone passage, the servants shook their heads.

"This won't last," Mrs. Bunce said; "nobody could put up with them boys. It's all very well for a freak."

But cousin Eleanor had a strange gift of putting up with boys, perhaps because she had one particular boy of her own, dearer to her than anything else in the world; all boys, whether rough or gentle, had an interest in her eyes. And certain it is that Jer Pidsley and two of the coachman's sons, little urchins of ten or twelve, and the gardener's boy from the Vicarage, and one or two others from the village, who were farm labourers, all felt that where cousin Eleanor was there must be order and obedience, and any disturbance in the hall was very rare.

I am sure the name the children gave to this room will amuse you. They called it "Interpreting Hall," because they had just read for the first time "Pilgrim's Progress," and they said it was like the room where Christian, and afterwards Christiana and her boys, were shown so many things. But I must now go on about this particular evening, when a great "secret" was in progress-a secret in which Lady Aylmer herself had taken some interest, and had contributed so handsomely that the Christmas tree promised to be a very beautiful one.

The tying up of the parcels, fastening on the little red and yellow candles, ticketing the presents, and counting them over and over to make sure nobody was forgotten, was delightful. Cousin Eleanor nooked as happy as the children, and if Pearl danced about so much that she did not stick in her pins very securely, and wrapped up her parcels so loosely that the contents peeped out rather inconveniently, still it was a pleasure to watch her little face, and cousin Eleanor stopped several times to kiss her.

"You've not guessed your secret, have you, cousin Eleanor?" Ruby asked; "because, you know, there is a big secret for you not on the tree. It's a surprise the 'company' says—a very big surprise."

For a letter had been received by the Jewels that very morning from Sir Ronald, saying that he hoped no one would attempt to hang cousin Eleanor's "secret" from the Christmas tree, as it would be far too big, and the poor tree would break down.

"If you did know, you would tell us, would you not, cousin Eleanor?" Ruby suggested. "I mean you would not let us think you had a secret when you knew all the time."

"What nonsense, Ruby! Lucy Dacre said if anybody knows, it's not a secret."

"Only a make-up one," said little Pearl; "a pretence, you know."

"The 'company' always does write such funny letters, and he is so nice," sighed little Pearl. "I wish

he would come and see us again. It's a year since he came."

- "Why, Pearl, it was in the summer, and very hot weather, Don't you remember? So as this is only Christmas, it can only be six months."
- "It seems a year," said Pearl again; "and, oh! it seems years since father went away."
- "Well," cousin Eleanor said, "we will count up all we have this afternoon, instead of all we have not, and we will think much of our absent ones this Christmas-tide, and pray for them."
- "Cousin Eleanor, didn't you know the 'company' when he was a little boy?"
- "I knew him when he was a big boy," Mrs. Christian said, laughing, "and I was a little girl."
  - " Wasn't he nice?" Ruby asked.
- "Yes, so nice; always brave and good, and always tender and gentle to little girls, though he was so rough and noisy when he was with other boys. I remember once "----
  - "Oh, is it a story, cousin Eleanor?"
- "Yes, a true story; very short, so don't expect great things, Ruby."
- "I remember once we were all at Lindisfarne, and went out a nutting expedition into the woods. Ronald was always the first to spring up to the

hazel trees and gather the bunches of nuts, and he always filled our baskets first, mine, and my little sister's, and his sister's—the mother of those boys who now live at Lindisfarne.

"As we were coming home through the wood, we saw two little girls sitting on the trunk of a tree crying, while in the branches of another tree sat two big boys, cracking nuts, and throwing the shells down at them. We asked the children what was the matter, and they said they had gathered a basketful of nuts and were sitting down on the tree to rest, when these two boys had come up to them, had snatched the basket from them, and filling their pockets with the nuts, had climbed up in the tree to eat them, and only laughed and jeered at them.

"We knew Ronald would be very angry at this, but we did not expect to see him spring up to the low branch of the spreading oak where the boys sat; then taking the biggest by the collar of his jacket he brought him down, saying—

"'You coward, you greedy coward, empty your pockets into the child's basket, or I will make you!'

"I can now see Sir Ronald, your 'company,' standing in a bit of sunlight which streamed across the green sward of the wood, and I see his eyes blazing with indignation, the more so, as the two boys who had attacked the little girls and robbed them called themselves gentlemen! The younger boy darted off, afraid of my cousin's anger, but the elder one could not stir, he was held too tightly, though he struggled and struggled and tried to kick with his great legs. At last Ronald called me to come near, and told me to empty the great jacket pockets of his captive which were bulging out with nuts. I confess that I was rather afraid of approaching the muttered, 'What business is it of yours?—leave go—I'll knock you down,' and so on, while the big feet kicked out in every direction.

- "'Don't go near,' Ronald's sister said, beginning to cry, 'you'll be hurt.'
- "'Leave the fellow alone,' another boy who was with us said.
- "But Ronald was not to be baffled; with one mighty twist he laid the boy down on the turf, and sat on him, to keep him steady, while in fear and trembling I turned the nuts out of the big side pockets of his jacket.
- "'There, now you may go,' Ronald said, as the nuts were put into the little girls' baskets, 'and here are a lot more to make up for what those fellows have eaten.'

"The big boy got up, shook himself, and settled his jacket; then, with a muttered threat, and saying he would have his revenge, he slunk off. The two little girls trotted home by our side, and when we told Sir John Bruce the story, I remember he said, 'Ronald ought to have been a knight of the old time,' and his mother answered, 'No, he ought to be what he is, a knight of our own day, dear boy.'"

The preparations were at last complete, the twilight had changed to darkness, the great logs of wood on the hearth were casting a ruddy glow on the children and on the tall figure in their midst, when the door opened quickly, and the person who opened it stood still a moment. But some one else was behind who rushed in headlong, nearly upsetting the Christmas tree, and quite upsetting a large hamper in which cousin Eleanor had carefully gathered all her bits of string, paper, and other untidiness, and with a cry of "Mother," cousin Eleanor's boy held her close in a tremendous hug.

Ruby and Pearl stood irresolute for a moment, and then cried—

"The 'company!' 'the company!' oh! isn't it nice?"

"Well," Sir Ronald said, "I'm glad to hear anybody speak. I thought I had got into an enchanted castle, and nobody could move. But take care!"

Cousin Eleanor had sunk down on one of the benches, and Nigel exclaimed, "Why, mother! what is the matter?"

"Nothing," cousin Eleanor said; "only surprise is sometimes rather hard to bear; even the surprise of joy like this, Nigel."

"I thought you would have guessed my secret," Sir Ronald said; "I am sorry now I made any secret of it, but when I proposed to go to the Isle of Man and bring the boy home for Christmas, you did not seem unwilling."

"Did you really go? And what did auntie say?"

"Say!" broke in Nigel; "she was quite jolly about it—awfully jolly, mother; and she said she had so many Christmas days alone, another would make no difference, and she thought I should have a much pleasanter Christmas here; but, I say, what a queer room this is!"

Mrs. Christian recovered herself in a few minutes, and asked Sir Ronald if he had seen Lady Aylmer.

"Yes, and I am commanded to beg you all to go to her room for afternoon tea in my honour; so now, my Jewels, lead the way." Pearl and Ruby were now seen whispering anxiously together. What was to be done? There was no present on the tree for Nigel; still worse, none for Sir Ronald. But, to their relief in one way and their sorrow in another, Sir Ronald was heard to say he was going home to Lindisfarne to keep his Christmas, and that he only came to Aylmer Castle to bring cousin Eleanor's big secret!

As usual, the tea with Lady Aylmer was a somewhat solemn time, but a delightful hour came afterwards before the late dinner, in cousin Eleanor's own particular room, when Nigel sat, or rather lay, on the rug before the fire at his mother's feet, and she bent down now and then to caress the thick chestnut curls which covered her boy's head. Then opposite cousin Eleanor Sir Ronald sat, a Jewel on either side of him, talking, chattering, laughing like two little birds, while Lucy Dacre plied a big bone crochet needle as she drew near the completion of a shawl, designed for Mrs. Bunce, which ought to have been ready by Christmas Eve.

"Was it not odd," Ruby was saying; "cousin Eleanor was telling a story of you in the Interpretation Hall just as you came?" Sir Ronald laughed his ringing, merry laugh, and said—

"Interpretation Hall! There never were two such funny little girls, I do believe."

"I don't see it's funny," said Ruby gravely, "to name this hall after that hall."

"Oh, I see! at the old makes-up; and how are Caleb and Jeremiah, and that little fellow with the dirty face? I must see them to-morrow, for I shall be here till the middle of the day."

"Caleb and Jer do lessons with cousin Eleanor," Pearl said; "and Jer is getting a much better boy. He listens to what cousin Eleanor says, and is learning to write quite nicely."

"Well, and what are you learning, Jewels? and does cousin Eleanor take out a birch rod?"

"No, she is never one bit angry; not even when Pearl ran away."

Little Pearl hid her face against Sir Ronald's arm, and said—

"Don't tell that, Ruby."

"So I am not to hear," said Sir Ronald kindly; "never mind, little one, as you came back all right."

"Yes, but you ought to mind," said Pearl; "for I was very naughty. I did so want half-a-crown the old gentleman wished to give me to buy Ben a big

kite, but cousin Eleanor told me not to take it, so I ought not to have gone back to the bun shop for it, and when I got there he was gone, and I turned into a wrong street, and I was dreadfully frightened, and so was cousin Eleanor."

Much of this, not very lucid account of herself was not understood by Sir Ronald, but he asked no disagreeable questions, and only one which both Jewels could answer. It was asked in a low tone, but cousin Eleanor and Nigel were so busy talking and so happy looking at each other, as Pearl said, that they did not hear. Sir Ronald's question was—

So Sir Ronald Bruce was satisfied.

<sup>&</sup>quot;What do you think of cousin Eleanor?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;That she is the best and sweetest and dearest of persons in the world; we think there could be no one like her—no one."

<sup>&</sup>quot;Except," said Ruby, in her slow, thoughtful way; "except mother."

### CHAPTER XVIL

#### DISAPPOINTMENT.

SIR RONALD came and went like a flash of lightning, the servants said, but he managed to do a great deal in a short time. A bright frosty morning favoured him, and he and the children and Mrs. Christian had been all over the place before the early dinner the next day, and had inspected everything there was to be inspected, from Caleb's "Inverness cape" that father had ordered he was to have to keep off the rheumatics, to a very elaborate E. C. worked in the corner of a pocket handkerchief by Ruby, under Mrs. Bunce's superintendence, and which was intended for cousin Eleanor.

As to cousin Eleanor herself, she had eyes and ears for everything and everybody. Joy in the possession of Nigel did not make her selfish, and she only took her boy into all their plans and preparations with a gladsome earnestness which was like herself.

Sir Ronald and Lady Aylmer were alone together for a few minutes before he started for the train at Cranworth, and Sir Ronald said—

"I hope you do not regret following my recommendation and asking Mrs. Christian to come here?"

"No, indeed!" was Lady Aylmer's answer. "I have every reason to be satisfied, though my old-fashioned notions make me think, perhaps, that Mrs. Christian gives herself too much trouble about the children, and those evening readings of hers with the poor in the village are a great tax on her patience."

"But what we should think a tax and a burden Eleanor thinks a pleasure," Sir Ronald said; "so tastes differ in this world. It is really very good of you to allow the boy Nigel to come; but you have your reward in seeing what a pleasure it is to both mother and son."

"He is a fine, handsome boy," Lady Aylmer said, "and I hope may be a comfort to his mother."

Then Sir Ronald said that he was commissioned by his mother, Lady Bruce, to invite the whole party to Lindisfarne for the summer holidays, and that he hoped she would give her consent to the plan.

"But Lady Bruce has so many children in the house already," Lady Aylmer objected; "and it is not a large place."

"No, but we treat it as if it were indiarubber," said Sir Ronald gaily; "there will be room for you also if you like."

Lady Aylmer shook her head. There was something in this frank, cheerful Sir Ronald which awoke in her a strange liking she felt for few people.

"His mother must be a happy woman," she sighed when he left the room, and was seen waving his hat to the children from the top of the dog-cart, as he drove off to the station at Cranworth.

The Christmas tree was a grand success. When I was a little girl it was quite a chapter of itself in a story to tell how a Christmas tree was decorated—the lights, the presents, the surprises. In those days Christmas trees were a novelty,—a custom brought over to us in England from our German neighbours,—and the object of much genuine admiration.

The scene in the "Interpretation Hall" at Aylmer Castle was a very bright one, and Ruby and Pearl, to their great joy, persuaded grandmother to come and "be happy." Lady Aylmer was very ornamental

in her black velvet dress and fine lace cap, and her gray hair glistening in the light. She sat on an oak chair with a footstool, at the end of the hall, and looked very like the Queen of the entertainment. A thick curtain had been hung across the upper part of the hall, and the boys and girls were arranged before it, Ruby and Pearl stationed on either side, and at a signal from Nigel they were to pull the cord which drew the curtain back in the middle, and displayed the tree, cousin Eleanor standing by it with Lucy Dacre ready to dispense the presents.

Old Caleb Pidsley was lost in astonishment, and little Ben danced about like an acrobat, Jer stood motionless, all eye and ear, and Pearl called his name three times before he advanced to receive his present. Pearl had begged to give Jer his parcels with her own hand, and advanced to the great awkward lad with her arms full.

"Here, Jer," she said, "is a beautiful big Bible, with large print—that's from cousin Eleanor; and here is a red comforter, Jer—I knitted *some* of it, not much, for you know I drop stitches, and"——

"But, Pearl, you ought not to tell who the things came from," Lucy said.

"Oh, I forgot; still there are not any secrets now. Jer, are you pleased?"

But Jer was speechless. He turned away and resumed his seat by his grandfather without a word.

Was Jer pleased? Yes, in his heart there was a fountain of love and gratitude opened that Christmas Eve that was to be as water to his thirsty soul, and he determined with all his heart to show he was grateful, by the most true and loyal service he could give to the family at the Castle.

Crackers, little baskets of sweets tied up with pink bows—all these things you know about without my telling you; but when the lights were put out and the glory of the Christmas tree was over, cousin Eleanor stepped forward and said how glad Lady Aylmer had been to see them all, and that perhaps by another Christmas Eve Sir Hugh Aylmer himself might be there to bid them welcome. Then she asked them all to join in singing a Christmas hymn—the dear old-fashioned hymn which always seems to bring the angels' joy in heaven and the sinners' joy on earth so near—

"Hark! the herald angels sing, Glory to the new-born King: Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."

It had been long since the "Interpretation Hall" had echoed to such joyful sounds at Christmas time,

for they all sang heartily and with a will, and then they all separated full of goodwill and peace.

The Christmas joy came and went; a new year dawned, and with it came a spell of bitter cold weather, when every pond was thickly coated with ice, and skating was the chief thought in the minds of most boys.

"Mother," Nigel said, bursting into the schoolroom one morning, "I can go out with Mr. Morris' boys, can't I? They are off to the mere beyond Cranbury Camp. You don't mind, mother?"

"No, dear; but I hope you have satisfied yourself that the ice is firm and will bear well."

"It's like a rock, mother, and I wish you would come and watch us, with the girls."

"It is rather too far for the children. I thought of taking them down to the pond below the Vicarage, if Mrs. Bunce does not object to it; but unless children can skate they get chilled on the ice."

"They ought to learn to skate," Nigel said; "if Lady Aylmer will let me, I will go into Cranworth and buy them some skates."

"I do not fancy Lady Aylmer will approve of skating for the children. It is better to say nothing about it, Nigel."

But Nigel was not as wise as his mother; he

not only told Ruby and Pearl that they ought to learn to skate, but further volunteered to go and buy them each a pair at Cranworth in the afternoon, if Lady Aylmer gave leave.

"Why, you two would look most awfully pretty on the ice in your red cloaks, and you are just the figures for it."

"O Nigel! do get us the skates, will you?"

"Well, you see, I can't without the money, and where is that to come from? Besides, mother thinks you had better not; but if I were you I would ask your grandmother. 'Nothing venture, nothing have!' Go and ask her."

Now for Ruby and Pearl to go to Lady Aylmer's room without being sent for was unheard of; but the eagerness for the skates made them forget everything else. They rushed off, down the long corridor on the wings of the wind, and then up the short flight of stairs, till they found themselves behind the red curtain, and at the door of Lady's Aylmer's room.

"Knock, Ruby, knock!" Pearl said.

Ruby gave a very faint tap, but receiving no answer, Pearl tapped sharply and loudly in her impatience at the door. Then Lady Aylmer's maid opened it. She had just put a little silver waiter

on a table by her mistress's side, with a cup of chocolate and a plate of bread and butter for Lady Aylmer's breakfast, who always had this little repast on coming into her sitting-room at eleven o'clock.

"It is the children, your ladyship."

"Oh! please, grandmother," said Ruby hurriedly, "please may Nigel buy us some skates at Cranworth? We do want to learn to skate so much!"

"Yes, grandmother, so much; please let us learn, do."

Pearl had drawn nearer, and raised her pleading face to Lady Aylmer's.

"Learn to skate! certainly not. It is a most unladylike amusement. I am greatly surprised that Mrs. Christian should have allowed you to make me such a request. Now, I am always quiet at this time of the day, you know; run away. I confess I am much surprised, and so I shall tell Mrs. Christian."

"But she said we mustn't," Pearl said eagerly.

"She said"——

"Do not shout like that, Pearl, it is so unladylike; run away."

Away went the Jewels, very crestfallen and penitent, and as soon as they got into the corridor again who should they meet but Lucy Dacre, dancing for joy, with a pair of shining new skates dangling from the straps, and calling out—

"Grandpapa bought me these last evening in Cranworth, and he says he will come with me and Nigel to the lake at Cranbury. Aren't you coming too?"

"No, we mustn't," said poor Ruby, while Pearl began to sob and cry, half in real sorrow and disappointment, half in anger against her grandmother. Presently Nigel came rushing into the hall, saying he had met the steward's sons and one of their sisters, and Lucy was to come at once, for Mr. Dacre was waiting, and Jer Pidsley is to come to carry skates, and make himself useful.—"What are you crying for?" he asked, turning to the two tearful little girls. "Come, don't howl like a banshee, Pearl. Won't the old lady let you have the skates? Well, it's an awful shame; but look here, I'll come with you to the pond this afternoon, and we'll push you about in a chair, that's very jolly; don't cry."

But when Pearl set off "in a cry" as Mrs. Bunce said, she never knew when to stop, and she always grew more rather than less miserable as she moaned over her woes.

It was certainly a trial to see Lucy Dacre survey-

ing her skates and begging Nigel to come, and seeming to care very little that Ruby and Pearl were disappointed.

"I shall go and call mother," Nigel said, "if you don't stop."

"Oh no, pray don't! for she told us not to go—at least she said she knew what grandmother would say," Ruby struggled to articulate. "Good-bye, Nigel, good-bye; I hope you'll enjoy yourself."

"Poor little things! it is an awful shame," Nigel said, with a final attempt at consolation; "but you shall have the chair on the pond, we shall be home in time—good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Lucy; "don't cry."

And then there was yet another comforter, a very rough, awkward one, but a very sympathetic one.

Jer, who was carrying a basket of sandwiches and other things after the skaters, stopped in his way across the hall, to say—

"I cannot bear to see you fret, Miss Pearl. I'll make you a nice sledge, see if I don't, that'll take you quicker than skates; don't fret."

"O Jer!" Ruby broke forth, "we are so disappointed, and Lucy Dacre is so pleased."

Jer made rather a disrespectful gesture at the mention of Lucy Dacre's name, and then strode off.

Sorrowfully and sadly the Jewels went back to the schoolroom, where Mrs. Christian was finishing a letter. She had imagined that Ruby and Pearl had gone into the nursery, or into the gallery, to have a skipping match, or a game of battledore, for of course it was holiday time now, and there were no regular lessons.

"Why, Pearl, what is the matter? Ruby, what has happened?"

"Grandmother was so cross when we went to ask her if Nigel might buy us some skates."

"Nigel ought not to have suggested such a thing," Mrs. Christian said gently; "and you ought not to have gone to Lady Aylmer after what I said. I knew she would disapprove of skating. But do not cry, I will take you to the pond by the Vicarage after dinner, and we will try and enjoy ourselves."

"But, cousin Eleanor, Lucy has got a beautiful shining pair of dear little skates,—why shouldn't we?"

"Yes, and she wasn't a bit sorry for us," said Pearl; "not a bit, she only kept calling Nigel to make haste. I don't think Lucy is kind."

"Well, now let us think of something else," cousin Eleanor said. "Here is a beautiful bright winter's morning, and everything is too cheerful

out of doors, for us to be miserable indoors. Go and have a skipping match in the gallery till the clock strikes twelve, and then I shall have finished my letters, and you must ask Mrs. Bunce to put on your cloaks and muffle you up very warm, and we will go down the village to see a little girl—she has something to cry for."

Then drawing Pearl to her, cousin Eleanor kissed her tenderly.

"Don't think I do not feel the disappointment for you, my Jewels; I know it is hard to be disappointed—hard for us all—and children's sorrows are very sharp for the time. Now, let us be happy, and forget the skates. When your father is here next Christmas, who knows you may each have a pair of skates, and he will teach you to use them. Now, clear up that cloudy face, Pearl, and run away till twelve o'clock."

### CHAPTER XVIIL

#### LITTLE NELLY.

THE children forgot their disappointment when they set out to the village with cousin Eleanor, each carrying a basket in which was some jelly and a piece of sponge cake.

It was a day to raise any spirits, so bright and cloudless was the sky, so pure and clear the frosty air, so dazzlingly white the light covering of snow which lay on the ground. Cousin Eleanor went past the church, down the village street till she came to the sexton's cottage, and after tapping at the door, there was the sound of a weak voice, saying, "Come in." Curled up on a large chair by the wood fire, which needed replenishing, was a little girl, hardly as old as Pearl, who looked up at cousin Eleanor with a pair of dark pathetic eyes.

"Well, Nelly, I have brought the two little

girls I promised, and there is some nice jelly in this basket. Ruby, look in the cupboard, and I think you will find a plate and a spoon; but I must make up this fire," cousin Eleanor said, "it wants some coal. Are you cold, Nelly?"

"Not very, only in my bad arm, ma'am, thank you," Nelly said, but she answered in an absent manner, she was thinking of Ruby and Pearl. "Are these the little Miss Aylmers?" she asked. "I have seen you in church," she said confidentially, "before this lady came. I've not been there for a long time."

"No; poor little Nelly! she has been shut up here for months, but she isn't unhappy."

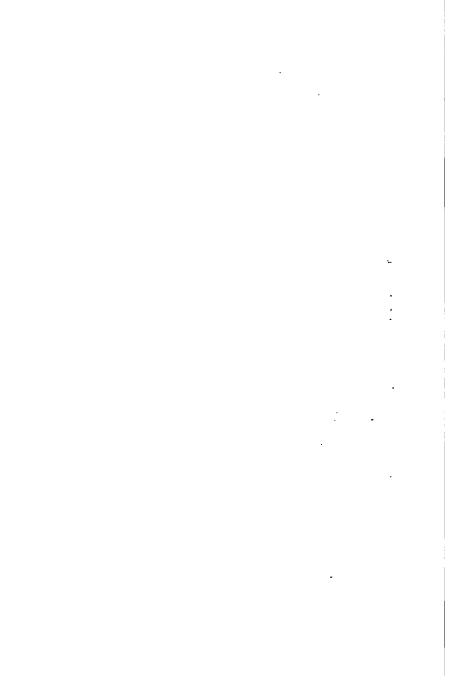
"Unhappy! no, ma'am, father is so kind, and so are you, and I think every one is kind. I did like the doll, ma'am, so much." And Ruby noticed, as the poor child tried to reach the Doll from a table near the chair, that her arm was helpless.

"She's asleep now," Nelly said to Pearl; "but isn't she pretty? I talk to her, and she is quite company for me."

While cousin Eleanor was talking, she had been busy making up the fire and tidying the room. Ruby had been to the cupboard, but seemed



"Curled up on a large chair was a little girl, who looked up at cousin Eleanor with a pair of dark, pathetic eyes."—Page 157.



hesitating, and at last came and whispered to cousin Eleanor—

"There is only a dirty plate and a horrid spoon; I can't put the jelly in there."

Cousin Eleanor laughed. "The plate is only browned by standing too near the fire, and the spoon is all right; it is pewter, not like yours, which is silver; but it is quite clean."

"Is it?" said Ruby doubtfully; but she turned the jelly out at last, and Nelly laughed to see how it "wobbled" on the dish, "shiddered and shuddered," as Pearl would once have said; but she was learning to give up this "upside-down talk," as Mrs. Bunce called it now. When the room was tidy, and Nelly had eaten some jelly and cake, cousin Eleanor got down the sexton's big Bible, with its shiny black cover, and read a few verses out of it, a very few; and she read so slowly and distinctly. Ruby and Pearl remembered some of the words which struck them: "Let patience have her perfect work."

"Isn't Nelly very patient, cousin Eleanor?" Pearl asked, when they were walking towards the castle again; "and how pretty she is! Why have we never seen her before?"

"Your grandmother did not approve of your visiting the cottages in the village, dear; but I asked her yesterday to make an exception with little Nelly, for I knew how beautifully clean and fresh everything is in the sexton's cottage."

"Grandmother is the greatest fidget that ever lived," Ruby said with vehemence.

"Hush, Ruby!" that is not the way to speak of your elders and betters. Your grandmother's one desire is to keep you safe and well till your father returns," cousin Eleanor said. "She is very thoughtful about you, and it is ungrateful not to remember it."

"Now we have seen Nelly, may we come again? And do tell us, cousin Eleanor, why she has one arm and leg helpless."

"She fell from the top of a high gate about a year ago and hurt her spine. This has paralysed her limbs, and she can never walk about again or be like other children. This is a greater trial, is it not, than being forbidden to skate?"

"Oh, don't, cousin Eleanor! We are so sorry we made such a fuss. Poor, poor little Nelly!"

"I should like to knit her a comforter," Pearl said.

"Or do one of those nice crochet shawls, pretty scarlet and grey, may I?" Ruby asked.

"Yes; and do you know, I think we can buy some wool at Mrs. Steele's, at the Post-office. Any-

how we will see; we will stop on our way home." And so, to the children's delight, they opened the door of Mrs. Steele's shop, of which a tingling little bell gave notice, and out came Mrs. Steele from the room behind, with her mouth full of bread and cheese, curtseying to Mrs. Christian, and wishing the little ladies a happy new year.

There was not much variety in Mrs. Steele's stock of wool, but there was some bright scarlet and speckled gray; and when it was done up in a piece of rather stiff, thick paper, Ruby was delighted to carry it home, and so anxious to begin the shawl that she quite forgot the ice, and was so eager to sit down with cousin Eleanor's big crochet needle and learn the stitch on a small ball of Mrs. Bunce's worsted, that she was quite sorry when the bell rang for dinner.

Lady Aylmer was very silent that day—I ought to have said, more than usually silent, and no reference was made to the skating; but just as the children were leaving the dining-room, Lady Aylmer said—

"Mrs. Christian, I should strongly disapprove of the children skating, or, indeed, of their going on the ice at all. It is most dangerous, and I am sure their father would object to it." "I do not think," cousin Eleanor began, "that there can be any fear or risk in my taking the children to the pond by the Vicarage; the ice is quite strong, and"——

"I cannot give my consent, Mrs. Christian; my weak state of health renders any agitation or anxiety most injurious to me, and I beg you will kindly attend to my wishes—the children are on no account to go on the ice. And, Mrs. Christian, they rushed in suddenly into my room this morning to ask for the skates; please do not allow them to disturb me again."

"I had no idea the children had come to you with this request. I am very sorry," cousin Eleanor said; "and I am very sorry to disappoint them about the pond by the Vicarage, they had so set their hearts on going there with me; but of course if you object to it, they shall not go on the ice—we will only walk round the pond and watch the boys sliding."

"I would rather that they did not attempt to walk on the ice. I am surprised that Mr. Dacre should have allowed his granddaughter to join a skating party, and your son is one of the number, I understand."

"Yes," cousin Eleanor said; "and I am very glad he should join it."

"For boys skating is a healthy exercise," Lady Aylmer said, and then Mrs. Christian followed the Jewels upstairs.

"How soon may we get ready?" Ruby asked.
"How soon will you go, cousin Eleanor?"

"We must lose no time, as the days are so short; but, my dear Ruby and Pearl, you must be contented with another walk into the village. Your grandmother will not allow you to go upon the ice."

"Not even on the Vicarage pond, cousin Eleanor?" asked Pearl, in a voice trembling with excitement.

"No, not even on the pond."

It was a second disappointment, and at first it seemed as if the children were going to take it much to heart. But though Ruby said "It was a dreadful shame," and Pearl stamped her foot and began to cry, something in cousin Eleanor's face stopped them. It was a sad and troubled look, and though she only said—

"O children! don't be naughty!" the gentle voice, sad like her look, had its effect.

"We'll try to bear it, though it is hard," Ruby said; "but I wonder grandmother can like to spoil all our pleasure."

"She is a horrid"——

"Oh! hush, Pearl. What would father say to hear you?"

Cousin Eleanor did her best to make the children forget their disappointment, and when they saw the number of boys on the pond, and the frequent falls, and the general scraping and scuffle and noise, they found their desire for the ice growing less, and were quite content with watching for about a quarter of an hour, and then to go out of the cold, frosty air into the Vicarage to pay Miss Dacre a visit. Miss Dacre did not fail to produce a few of her beautiful ginger biscuits and some ginger ale, made from a home receipt, which fizzed and sparkled in the tall tumbler in which little Pearl's face was lost when she drank out of it,

There was a lovely crimson glow in the west when the children and cousin Eleanor turned homewards. The old clock-tower of the castle stood grandly up, and a belt of dark fir-trees was traced distinctly against the sky. It was freezing hard, and in the quiet, still, frosty air every sound was distinctly heard.

As they drew near the castle yard, cousin Eleanor said—

<sup>&</sup>quot;Hark! what is that?"

It was the sound of some one crying, and cousin Eleanor's heart gave a great throb. Somehow she felt that wail concerned her. And she was right. For when they reached the old gateway of the quadrangle, cousin Eleanor sprang forward, towards a figure lying prostrate on the ground, with a cry of "Nigel! O Nigel!"

# CHAPTER XIX.

#### HOW IT HAPPENED.

"Well, now then, Nigel," Mrs. Christian said, when Nigel had come into her sitting-room with dry clothes, "how did it happen?"

"Yes, tell us all about it, Nigel; and about Jer," said Pearl.

"Jer seems a favourite of yours, Pearl; he and I have made friends too. What do you think he said, mother, as we were coming home behind the rest you know, for our clothes were so stiff and heavy with freezing water. Well, I was thinking it over, and how I felt when the ice went from under my hands, and I wondered if I could swim under it, and all that."

"O Nigel, you don't mean to say it was as bad as that," and cousin Eleanor's lips trembled.

"Well, yes; but it's over now. I got into a weakish place, it seems, where it was young

ice, and I went down like a shot; and there I was hanging on, and nobody was near, when I heard a low whistle, and there was Jer, creeping up to me on hands and knees. 'Hold hard, sir,' I heard him say; 'hold hard, I'm coming.' Well, I did try to hold hard, but my fingers were numb, and I had awful cramp in one of my legs. At last the right hand slipped into the water, and then I said to myself, 'The other will go next, when, just as I began to feel very queer, and all that, my arm was seized by Jer. How he did hurt to be sure. I've got bruises as big as shillings where his great fingers pinched me. Then he held me tight, and hauled me back, very carefully though, for the ice crackled and the water swished, and then one of the young Morrises saw what was up, and he crept near and pulled at Jer, and so I was hauled out from the ice, and I am not a pin the worse, though I did fall down like a log in the courtyard, and Lucy set up a howl. Come now, mother, don't cry; I am none the worse."

"O Nigel, Nigel! I trust you are the better. I trust you will often give God thanks for His mercy. I shudder when I think of what might have been."

Then Nigel sprang up, and flung his arms round cousin Eleanor; and Ruby and Pearl looked on, and Ruby sighed to herself, "How they love each other!"

Just then there was a tap at the door, and in came Mr. Dacre to inquire, and to tell his version of the story, which differed somewhat from Nigel's.

"How did he get on the weak part of the ice?"

"Has he not told you that Lucy was nearer to it than any one knew or saw but Nigel, and he skated after her to stop her, and I suppose her lighter weight went over safely, while his was just the straw too much that broke the ice, like the camel's back."

"What camel?" Pearl asked. "Did a straw really break it right through the hump too!"

Pearl's funny question came at the right moment, and Mrs. Christian joined in Nigel's shouts of laughter, with Mr. Dacre.

"O Pearl!" Ruby said, "it's only a story; there never was such a camel."

"I am glad of that," said little Pearl, "because I know that when a back is hurt like Nelly's, people are —— oh! Bunny told me the word, it's something like 'paradised,' and camels are such patient things, it would be hard!"

"O child!" said Mr. Dacre, "you'll break my back with laughing."

But cousin Eleanor called Pearl, who was looking rather grave at all this merriment at her expense, and said—

"Come and sit on my lap here, darling, while we hear the end of the story."

"That's all, mother," Nigel said.

"No, my boy, that is not all. You risked your life, I hear, to warn Lucy of her danger, and the lake is twenty feet deep just in that place, so you must let me thank you before your mother, and tell her she has reason to be proud of her son."

Nigel really was astonished at the turn things had taken, and he only said—

"As if I could see a girl in danger without trying to stop her! It is Jer Pidsley who is the hero of the hour. He did make a fight for my life, if you like."

"Yes, that he did," was Mr. Dacre's reply; "and I have just looked in at old Caleb's cottage, to tell him about it, for you young fellows don't blow your own trumpets."

Again little Pearl wondered at the saying, but wisely contented herself by repeating in a whisper, "Trumpets!"

"I found Jer standing by the fire, stupid fellow, never attempting to change his clothes. I ordered him off to bed, and he said he had a 'crick' in his back, and he couldn't get upstairs. I am afraid he has got a chill, and the frost is so sharp that his trousers were as stiff as boards."

"So were mine," Nigel said. "But now, mother, you must hear what Jer said. I began with that, and never got to the part I wanted you to hear. Jer said, when I thanked him, that it was nothing, and that he would have been 'drownded right off' rather than you should fret." Nigel's voice shook a little now, and the flush on his handsome face grew brighter. "I call it worth a ducking to hear a poor fellow like that speak of you as he did. He said Pearl began it by being kind to him. Then little Pearl and Miss Ruby too, only Miss Ruby was more of the young lady; and then the next thing was, a gentleman came"——

<sup>&</sup>quot;The 'company!'" Pearl exclaimed.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Sir Ronald Bruce, of course," Ruby said.

<sup>&</sup>quot;And he spoke to him as if he were something better than dirt under his feet; and then came the *lady*—she had made him wish to be a better chap, because she talked so pretty about love, and was so loving herself. And then he finished up by saying he loved

the lady as no tongue could tell, leastways not his, for he had no choice of words; but I told the poor fellow he had choice enough for me. And, now, that is the end of the story. But you'll go and see him to-morrow, mother, won't you?"

"Yes, indeed, dear. I would go now, but it is too late, and you are to dine with Lady Aylmer and me, you know."

"Bother Lady Aylmer! I beg your pardon, mother," as he saw her grave glance at Mr. Dacre; but these dinners are so awfully slow. I hope the Jewels are to come down to dessert?"

"Yes, they are invited to-night, and then they shall stay up to prayers. I feel as if I should like them to be there, especially if Jer comes in."

"He won't do that to-night, I fancy," said Mr. Dacre. "But I must go and look after Lucy and my daughter, and say good-bye."

The dinner was, as Nigel said, slow. Lady Aylmer went through the proper routine with marvellous exactness. It did not matter to her whether there were many guests or few. The stately Benson paced round with slow, solemn step, as the footman handed him the dishes to which Nigel was tired of saying, "No, thank you." Lady Aylmer was a little more formal and precise than usual this

evening, and cousin Eleanor was going over and over in her mind the escape her boy had had, so that she did not talk brightly on many subjects as usual.

It was a relief when, the dessert being on the table, Sam opened the door, and Ruby and Pearl appeared in their snowy white Cashmere frocks, trimmed with swandown, and brightened with scarlet bows.

Lady Aylmer looked at the children with pride and satisfaction, and thought if their father could see them he would say she had well fulfilled her promise to care for them in every possible way.

Pearl sat next cousin Eleanor on a high cane stool with a low back, and Ruby next her grandmother at the top of the table.

An orange prepared for Pearl by cousin Eleanor engrossed her attention for some time. It was made into the shape which, when I was a little girl, I used to call the "water lily," so that there is convenient little handles of peel attached to the bit of orange very slightly, and then you can eat it comfortably and tidily.

Pearl was enchanted with the effect of the orange set round the plate with sugar in the middle, and Nigel tried to make a clumsy copy of his mother's performance for Ruby. At last Pearl's tongue began to run in its usual quaint way. She had forgotten all about the rush to her grandmother's room in the morning, and the sharp rebuke she had received. She suddenly said—

"Grandmother, aren't you glad Nigel wasn't drowned; and it was all Jer's doing, Caleb's Jer, grandmother."

Lady Aylmer looked inquiringly at Nigel, and then at his mother.

"I have heard nothing of it. What is it, Mrs. Christian?"

"I did not tell you," cousin Eleanor said, "because I feared to make you anxious, not about Ruby and Pearl, of course; for they will never go on the ice, as you forbid it. But as God so mercifully preserved my boy, I thought I would not tell you of it."

"I think I ought to know what happens to any guest in this house," said Lady Aylmer stiffly. "It is not pleasant to be taken by surprise."

Cousin Eleanor did not speak, and Nigel saw by her quivering lips that she was nearly crying.

"There was a weak part of the ice on Cranbury Mere," he began, "and I went on it, and it cracked and I fell in. It was nobody's fault but my own; and Jer Pidsley saved me from getting under by crawling up to the edge of the hole and hauling me

up—that is all. I am not a bit the worse, and I am only sorry it happened, because it has upset my mother."

"Have you sent for Dr. Scott to see your son, Mrs. Christian?" Lady Aylmer asked. "If not, I beg he may see him at once."

"I am all right," said Nigel, "thank you; it's Jer who is hurt, I am afraid. He has strained himself somewhere."

"Dr. Scott must attend to them," said Lady Aylmer. "I do trust, Mrs. Christian, that this will be a warning to you not to allow such a dangerous amusement. It is most agitating to me to hear of it;" and Lady Aylmer pressed her hand to her side.

"I am very sorry," cousin Eleanor said, "to have caused you any uneasiness." But her voice faltered, and she could not go on.

"Lucy Dacre goes on the ice, grandmother, and so do heaps of little girls," Ruby ventured to say; "and Mr. Heathcote, who wished to give Pearl the big kite, says every one ought to learn to skate."

"Not so loud, Ruby," Lady Aylmer said; "we are not deaf."

"Well," said Pearl, "I am glad Nigel is not hurt—so glad; but I am very sorry about poor Jer, who has got a *rick* in his back, Bunny says."

"A hay rick or a corn rick, which?" asked Nigel, laughing; and then Lady Aylmer rose, which was the signal for saying good-night.

When the servants were assembled for prayers, cousin Eleanor saw a white face she could hardly recognise seated on the bench at the end of the hall.

"Jer," she said, "I am afraid you are hurt. You should not have come out again."

Jer tried to smile, but it was a ghastly attempt.

Then cousin Eleanor finished reading, and in a few simple words gave thanks to God for the great goodness He had showed her in preserving Nigel's life.

Afterwards she asked the servants to stop a minute, and then she told them of Jer's brave conduct, and said she must always feel a debt of gratitude to him.

"Gratitude to Jer! to Jer Pidsley!—that rough, untaking boy, only kept out of the master's charity, as he was Caleb's grandson." No, Mrs. Bird could not understand it, nor Mrs. Bunce, nor Benson, nor Sam, nor any one but little Pearl, who murmured as she went off to sleep, "I am glad cousin Eleanor loves Jer—poor Jer!"

# CHAPTER XX.

#### THE CITY GATE.

THE frost lasted for a long time, and the earth was ice-bound.

"When spring comes then Jer will be better," the children said, while old Caleb shook his head and said "he wasn't so sure of that."

For the "crick" in Jer's back had proved a very serious matter, and at last Dr. Scott said an abscess was forming, and that, perhaps, when that was dispersed he might be better. And now the frost was gone, and Nigel had gone with it back to King William's College, and the early days of February were soft and mild, but Jer was not out in the garden working at the celery-beds, but was lying on a sofa Mrs. Christian had got for him, placed close to the fire in Caleb's cottage.

A good woman in the village now attended to Jer, and kept the cottage tidy, and looked after Caleb's comfort, and little Ben. "There's a deal of work to be done in the garden," Jer said one day to Mrs. Christian, "and my grandfather ain't up to it; will you please to tell Mr. Morris to fill up my place with an able-bodied fellow—one of the young Smiths will be glad enough of it."

"But, Jer, we will not say to fill up your place yet," Mrs. Christian said. "Please God, you will be at work again before the summer, Dr. Scott thinks so."

"I don't then," poor Jer said with his old roughness. "I don't then, for you see, ma'am, it is not only the pain, it's a queer numb feel all down my legs and up one arm; that's what I don't think looks like getting right."

"O Jer!" Mrs. Christian said, "I can scarcely bear to hear you say so, when I think that you hurt yourself in saving my boy's life."

Then a smile broke over Jer's rugged features which made him look almost handsome.

"Why, that's the best part of it," he said; "that and Miss Pearl being glad I did it. You and Miss Pearl are that good to me, that it makes things seem easy, and then I feel as if God were good through it all."

"O'Jer! you make me so happy when you say that, you do indeed."

"Ah, but I have been a rough one, ma'am; worse than you know, and sometimes I am ready to think God can't love me."

"Jer, don't you remember how He is able, and willing too, to save to the uttermost? Don't you remember how He said He came to seek and to save the lost? Don't you remember how He says He rejoices over one sinner who is sorry for sin?"

"Yes, and I am sorry; only it takes a deal of learning to learn to be good."

"It takes time for everything to grow, doesn't it, Jer?" Mrs. Christian said. "Look at that tiny sprout of green just peeping up in the bed by the door, even that will not grow into a beautiful flower in a day, and the root has been a long time underground before even that green spike was pushed up. So, Jer, God's grace often works silently in the heart, deep, deep out of sight, and then there is some such flower of unselfishness, or self-forgetfulness, or goodness, which comes from God, and so all men know that a disciple of the Lord is with them."

Poor Jer! Many, many weary weeks and months passed, but he was seen no more in the gardens round the castle. Jer's back grew worse, and little Pearl in her daily visit to Caleb's cottage would

come away hopeful, with the hopefulness of child-hood, when no one else had any hope left.

One evening, late in May, Ruby and Pearl went down the terrace where our old friends the peacocks were shutting up their tails for the night. Ruby and Pearl had very hot faces, and looked very much excited. Every few steps they took they stopped to peep into the basket they carried, and Pearl, with a satisfied sniff, said—

"It smells very nice. Oh! I hope he will eat it."

"If not, Ben will," Ruby said; "so it won't be wasted."

Ruby was, as we know, given to look at the practical and useful side of everything.

"But we didn't make the cake for Ben, he can eat anything,—I saw him eating a raw carrot yesterday; but Jer eats nothing, and he will like the cake because we made it. But, oh! how hot Mrs. Bird's room was," said Pearl, with a sigh; "my face feels all in a 'conflammation.'"

"Inflammation," Ruby suggested.

"No, it begins with con, I know; it is conflammation," Pearl said. "I don't mean what Bunny's little niece had in her lungs."

Ruby shook her head wisely, but could not suggest

"conflagration," which was probably the word floating in Pearl's little brain.

And now they had left the flower garden and the lawn, and had crossed the kitchen garden, with its frames and asparagus beds, and its big bushes of lavender, and its sweet-smelling herbs.

Jack Smith was at work there, and Ben was weeding, and old Caleb was bowed nearly double over some early potatoes he was collecting.

They were working after hours, but Jack Smith was always ready to do an extra turn to help the infirm old man, who was but a feeble head gardener. The children nodded and smiled, and waved the basket at Caleb, who was very deaf, and though he raised his head when Pearl called out in her silvery tones, "We have got something nice for Jer," he did not catch a word of what she said.

When they reached Caleb's pretty cottage, with its porch covered with honeysuckle and clematis and Ayrshire roses, Ruby stopped at the door.

"Let's go in gently; Jer may be asleep. Cousin Eleanor said he had had such a bad night."

So the Jewels stepped softly in after a very tiny tap, which Jer did not hear. Poor Jer! he was lying back on his pillows faint and weak; he was so changed that no one who had not seen him since the day when Sir Ronald Bruce first came to Castle Aylmer would have known him. Perhaps the sight of illness and pain, and the effect it has on the sufferer, may not be familiar to the children who read this story, but if it should be so they will know what a change it makes.

Long illness, especially when patiently borne, has a refining power, and the homeliest features perhaps show it most. Jer Pidsley's face was pale and thin, and his dark eyes were unnaturally light. A beautiful crimson flush rose to his cheeks when Little Pearl went softly up to him, saying—

"Guess, Jer, what I have got here! Guess!"

Jer watched her lift up the lid of the basket, and
said—

"A cake."

"Yes, a sponge cake; but that is not all. Ruby and I made it—beat the eggs, pounded the sugar, chopped the citron, to make it 'tasty,' Mrs. Bird said, and put it into the tin, and watched the oven. And oh! it was so hot, and it caught at the side and it's just a wee bit 'leady' at the bottom; but you are not to eat the bottom, only the fluffy, rocky top. See, Jer!"

"And there's some jelly flavoured with raspberry,"

Ruby said. "We did not make that, but it is very pretty. Look!"

Jer looked, and tried to smile.

Then Pearl went to the little shelf and took down a plate with a big rose in the middle, which Caleb had bought at Cranworth market five years ago, and a spoon, and then the children put the jelly on it, and broke off a bit of the rocky top of the cake, and held it to Jer.

Poor Pearl was so disappointed when Jer shuddered and turned away his head.

"What is it? Are you cold, Jer?"

"No, Miss Pearl, I am burning hot; but—I—I ain't hungry."

Pearl looked ready to cry as she said-

"Oh, can't you be hungry for a bit of our very own cake? Do try to be hungry, Jer."

The look of disappointment on the sweet little face turned up to him made Jer say—

"Oh! it's a beautiful cake—too good for me, Miss Pearl. I'll keep it, and nibble a bit at night to help to pass the time. Now, I'll tell you what I should like—that's for you and Miss Ruby to sing me a hymn. I'd like that."

"We'll try," said Ruby; "which one, Jer, do you like best? We don't know many, like cousin Eleanor."

"Sing the one Ben is always humming, about the Lord Jesus dying for us; that'll suit me."

Then in slow and measured tones the children raised their sweet, childish voices, and when they had got to the end Jer said faintly—

"I'd like it all over again—all over again. 'He only can unlock the Gate of Heaven and let us in,'" Jer said. "He'll let me in; won't He, Miss Pearl?" Something about Jer struck Pearl with awe.

"Yes, Jer," she whispered, "and me too, and Ruby, and father, and then we shall find mother."

Once more they sang the simple, childish hymn, which needs no explanation, which carries the glorious message of the dear Lord, of Christ crucified, in every line, and when the children stopped Jer was asleep.

They crept softly away, and met old Mrs. Smith, who was coming to watch Jer for the night.

"He's asleep," Pearl said; "don't wake him."

"Ah, poor fellow! he'll soon sleep never to wake again. Missie, he is going fast."

Pearl's tears choked her; the words sounded unfeeling, though they were not intended to be unfeeling.

"It's hard on old Caleb, that it is, to lose Jer just as he was paying of him back for all he's been

and done for the whole lot. But, there, that is not the way to talk to you little ladies, so I wish you good evening."

When the children reached the castle, they found cousin Eleanor in earnest consultation in the terrace with Dr. Scott.

"The children will probably escape," Dr. Scott was saying; "but I should urge the necessity of great care. It is, as you know, a most infectious complaint, and one can never be up to it. So do not let the children have any communication with her for some time. It is a mild case, but the next may be severe."

- "Shall I tell Lady Aylmer?"
- "No, not unless she inquires for Miss Dacre. She is so very nervous, and"——
- "Fidgetty!" Dr. Scott felt inclined to add, but thought better of it, raised his hat politely, and with "Good evening, little Jewels," he was gone.

#### CHAPTER XXI.

### THE KING'S JEWELS.

"Is Lucy's cold worse, cousin Eleanor?" Ruby asked. Contrary to her usual habit, cousin Eleanor did not reply, but stood looking in a dreamy way at the two children, as if her thoughts were elsewhere. "Was it Lucy Dr. Scott was talking about, cousin Eleanor?" Instead of answering the question, cousin Eleanor asked—

- "What day was Lucy here last?"
- "Monday, cousin Eleanor; the day she was so cross about her drawing-pencil, which she said Pearl had taken."
- "And I never touched it," Pearl said; "but Lucy was very cross."
- "Lucy was not well," cousin Eleanor said. "You will not see her for a long time. Lucy has got scarlet fever, and is to be kept in bed."
- "Scarlet fever!" said little Pearl; "that's very infecting, isn't it?"

"Yes, very infectious," cousin Eleanor said with a smile; "but we must pray God to preserve all in the castle from it. How is poor Jer?"

"He is very ill indeed," Ruby said; "and he could not touch the cake, and I don't think he cared for the jelly. He is not a bit like Nelly, who is always so hungry."

"Jer is much more ill than Nelly is, dear Pearl."

"I know it, I know it," said the child, and burst into a fit of convulsive crying.

Cousin Eleanor lifted her in her arms, and carried her up to the nursery, where she did her best to comfort her. A strange misgiving was in cousin Eleanor's heart, and Lady Aylmer thought her unusually silent at dinner that evening.

Presently Lady Aylmer said-

"Little Lucy Dacre has not been here for nearly a week, have you heard if her cold is better?"

"Yes," cousin Eleanor said. "I saw Dr. Scott this evening, and he told me Lucy was still very ill."

"Very ill! I hope it is nothing infectious. Of course, Mrs. Christian, you will not go near the Vicarage till we ascertain what the complaint is

from which the poor child is suffering. I wonder Dr. Scott did not mention it when he was with me this afternoon."

"Jer Pidsley, old Caleb's grandson, is sinking now, I fear," Mrs. Christian said by way of diversion.

"I am sure you have done your utmost for him, poor fellow," Lady Aylmer said. "I think he is grateful."

"Grateful!" Mrs. Christian repeated. "I can never forget what I owe him; and there is much to be thankful for in poor Jer. It may, indeed, be said of him, 'Old things have passed away, and all things have become new.'"

That night when cousin Eleanor went to look at the children, as was her invariable custom, she found Pearl hot and restless. She was talking in her sleep, and Mrs. Bunce said that she had been very sick before she laid her down, and had done nothing but toss about ever since.

Cousin Eleanor looked at the quietly sleeping Ruby, and made up her mind. She beckoned Mrs. Bunce into the nursery, and said—

"I should like to have Pearl to sleep in my room to-night, for I think she is sickening of scarlet fever." "Oh, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunce; "whatever shall we do?"

"Trust in God, and do our best," was the prompt reply. "Will you send Ellen to me, and I will prepare my room for the child."

"But why should you have her, ma'am? I am the properest person; and, after all, it may turn out nothing."

"It may; but Miss Lucy is ill of this complaint at the Vicarage, and I confess I have but little hope that this is a false alarm. Anyhow, we must do our best, and be on our guard."

Dear little Pearl! It was indeed as cousin Eleanor feared; and by the next morning the rash was fully out on her, and her throat so swollen and sore that she could scarcely swallow.

Those who have had scarlet fever do not want me to tell them how very ill it made Pearl feel; how dry were her parched lips; how she felt so sore as if she had been "beaten with sticks," as she said pathetically; how her poor little head throbbed and ached; and how she tossed and turned to get a cool place in vain.

Ruby sickened on the third day, and now cousin Eleanor's hands were full. Ruby was not so ill as Pearl, and Dr. Scott said hers was a mild case, like Lucy Dacre's, who was getting on well. As the days wore on, and Pearl grew worse rather than better, cousin Eleanor asked Dr. Scott if Sir Hugh ought to have a telegram. A daily diary about the children had been written and posted by the usual Indian mail, but now there was no doubt that little Pearl lay between life and death.

"Yes, I will telegraph," Dr. Scott said gravely. "I do not say there is no hope, for every hour she goes on, gives hope; but she is in great danger. The other children are doing well," he added. "It is you," he said, "who will be ill next, unless you consent to let a nurse share your labour."

"No," cousin Eleanor said; "I am in the place of Pearl's mother. I cannot give her up. I pray God to spare her life for her poor father's sake."

That night cousin Eleanor watched and prayed by the child's side. It was a still summer night, and through the open window came the scent of flowers and the dewy breath of the newly-mown grass, and over all there was the dark blue sky studded with countless stars.

Suddenly Pearl raised herself.

"Jer," she called in the low, hoarse voice which came from her swelled throat,—"Jer, say I am coming," she murmured. "Tell mother,—you'll

know her, Jer,—tell her Jesus will soon send for me."

"Hush, my sweet one, hush!" cousin Eleanor said, folding her arms round the child, and gently laying her down on the pillow.

"Oh dear," said little Pearl, "it's nice to have mother again. Ruby said she'd never come back from the hills any more."

Then Pearl lay very still, and soon the dawn broke, and the little birds began to sing, faintly at first, then in a full chorus, and all the bright and beautiful flowers lifted their heads to greet the sun, and the cock crowed far off, and the peacocks gave a half-awakened call from the terrace, but little Pearl did not move.

Cousin Eleanor, worn out and tired, sank down by the child's side and prayed, "If it is possible, spare the child to her father and to us all. What shall we do without her? But if the Lord wants this Jewel for His Heavenly Kingdom, if He sees best to take His own to shine with brightness in the Mansion of His Father, we must not say, 'What doest Thou?'—we must trust Him."

Thoughts like these came sweetly and peacefully to cousin Eleanor, and mingled with a waking dream in which she seemed to see the place where the King keeps His Jewels safe,—all of dazzling brightness, all shining on the pure white robes of little children. And then as she looked she saw they were safe and happy and joyful, and the sound of their songs of praise mingled with the songs of the birds; and starting up, cousin Eleanor saw Dr. Scott standing on the other side of the bed.

"Well," he said, "I am glad you have had a little sleep; the child is better, her pulse is stronger, and I think she will pull through and"——

But cousin Eleanor heard no more, she staggered from the bed to the floor, fainting from excess of thankfulness.

# CHAPTER XXIL

#### RECOVERY.

PEARL got better from that time, but it was a very altered little Pearl that crept out into the sunshine one lovely July day, holding cousin Eleanor's hand tightly in hers. All the beautiful golden hair was gone, and Lady Aylmer, who was still afraid of infection, and kept to her own room, looking from the window, could not restrain her tears.

"Is that the dear child?" she said to her maid.
"I should not have known her."

Ruby was with her, walking with slow steps, though but little changed. Her golden brown locks had not been cut off, and she had had a comparatively slight attack of the fever. As Mrs. Bunce said, neither she nor Miss Dacre looked a pin the worse for it, but Miss Pearl! poor Mrs. Bunce had still many misgivings about her, which were shared by the household at Castle Aylmer.

And where was Pearl going?

I daresay you will guess. Jer had longed to see her once more; longed and prayed to live that he might see her and Mrs. Christian again.

And now little Ben had been taken away by a kind farmer's wife, and there was no longer any danger of infection for old Caleb and Mrs. Smith who took care of them, so that cousin Eleanor felt no fear of doing harm. She had already seen Jer, and when she asked him if there was anything he wished for that she could give him or do for him, he had said—

"If it is not asking too much, I should like to see the little ladies once again before I die."

So now Ruby and Pearl were once more on their way to old Caleb's cottage. He was sitting in the porch, with his hands on his knees, and a short pipe in his mouth, when the children and cousin Eleanor arrived. When Pearl went near him and looked up into his face from under her wide straw hat, he started.

"Miss Pearl, dear! how you be altered. Where's all your pretty hair?"

"Oh! that's cut off, Caleb; it was so hot when I was ill."

"With hair or no hair, we are right glad to see you again, bless your little heart; and Miss Ruby too, how she's grown! Jer is very weak to-day—very weak, but he is counting the minutes till he sees you."

Ah! what great hungry eyes of expectancy were turned to the door from the sofa in the corner, as cousin Eleanor went softly in, and the children followed her.

"God is very good to let me see you again, Miss Pearl," Jer said in a low, hoarse voice.

Pearl drew nearer, and laid her little thin white hand in Jers.

There was a grave look in her face, as of one who had been to the very Gates of the City and had come back. Pearl had lost all her baby prettiness, and looked older and graver, as well as thinner and taller.

"I've prayed hard to God to spare you, Miss Pearl; and one night, now three weeks ago, I was lying awake counting the stars up there, and I did ask the Lord to make you well. They had told me you were going fast, and I didn't know how to bear it, and the next morning when I thought to hear you were gone I heard you were better. Then I thanked the Lord, and I have thanked Him ever since. Miss Pearl, don't you fret for me; I am glad to go. And mind you tell Mr. Nigel I thought

of him, and never forgot that night he came to bid me good-bye before he went to school. Mind you tell him that he must love the Lord and come to Heaven."

Ruby and Pearl felt too much solemnised to cry, and Pearl's ready tongue was silent, but she crept closer and closer to Jer, and when cousin Eleanor said, "You must not stay any longer, darlings; say good-bye now," Pearl looked up at cousin Eleanor and said—

"Lift me up to kiss Jer, please."

Mrs. Christian did as Pearl wished, and the child bent down and kissed Jer's white forehead.

"Jer, good-bye. I am so glad you are good and happy. I shall know you when I come; and if you see mother, tell her about her little girls. Good-bye."

Jer did not speak, but lay back exhausted on his pillows, and so they left him.

Later that evening cousin Eleanor went back to the cottage, for she saw the end was not far off. A strong tie bound her to Jer—a tie of love and gratitude never to be broken. Cousin Eleanor sent old Mrs. Smith and the coachman's wife away, and was left alone with Jer. She sang hymns to him and prayed, and it seemed as if God were there—very near.

It did seem difficult for cousin Eleanor to believe

that the pale, patient, gentle boy, lying so calmly waiting for death, could be the rough, ill-conditioned youth whom she had seen when she first came to Castle Aylmer, apparently so strong in body, and so determined and self-willed, and untaking and unsatisfactory.

Dr. Scott had told Mrs. Christian that the strain poor Jer had got in his heroic attempts to save Nigel had probably developed a lurking mischief in his system, and that he was not as strong and robust as he looked, but had inherited his mother's delicacy.

"You'll look after little Ben," Jer said, "please, ma'am; and there's Willy and Hal—I can't help thinking of them."

"I will do what I can for them all, dear Jer," Mrs. Christian said; "and Sir Hugh will perhaps be home very soon, and then he will do everything that is right for Caleb's grandchildren."

"You are very good, ma'am. Do you know, it was your being so kind, and "—Jer's voice faltered—"and little Miss Pearl loving me that softened me first. I couldn't stand it somehow, and it is easier for a rough fellow like I was, to believe in the love of God when others show love like what little Miss Pearl did to me. 'Do be good,' she used to say. Well, I can't say any more; but don't let any one

think they can do good by preaching and scolding; it's only love will do it."

Only love! Oh! Jer was right; and let every child feel sure that to love and be kind and tender is an especial mission of childhood. What dear little Pearl did for Jer all little children may do if they wish and strive and pray, above all, if they feel in their own hearts the sunshine of God's great love to them in the child Christ Jesus.

It was Mrs. Christian's last good-bye to Jer. The next morning he was asleep when she went to the cottage, and at ten o'clock the carriage came to the door, and she and the children and Mrs. Bunce and Ellen drove off in it to the station at Cranworth, followed by the cart piled up with luggage, on their way to the sea-side, to blow away all the effects of the scarlet fever at Tenby.

Lucy Dacre was with them, and Lady Aylmer came to the window waving her good-bye to them.

"I wish grandmother was not so afraid of being infected," little Pearl said; "I should like to kiss her, and say good-bye."

Pearl raised herself energetically as the carriage rolled off, to look her last, not at the clock-tower, or the grand old gateway, or the long façade, where the pointed windows of the gallery were all in a long row. No, her eyes were fixed on the gabled roof of the gardener's cottage, the chimney just visible amongst the trees, from which a line of blue smoke was curling upwards.

"Good-bye, Jer; dear Jer," she said, kissing her little hand, "good-bye;" and then Pearl sank down in the carriage, and laying her head against cousin Eleanor's shoulder, cried softly and gently for some time.

That evening Jer's pain was at an end, and God took him home.

A month at Tenby did wonders for the whole party, and something like vigour and health returned to our little Pearl. Not that she was at all fit for the long rambles that Ruby and Lucy took every day, nor for the expeditions for crabs and shrimps in the little clear pools, nor for the continuous out-of-door life which seemed to be natural to Ruby and Lucy Dacre.

Little Pearl liked to be quiet, and, above all, to be with cousin Eleanor.

"I am so sorry you have not had Nigel all these holidays," she said one day, putting her little hand into cousin Eleanor's. "I don't forget how you must want him."

"Yes, darling, I have wanted him; but he has been so happy at Lindisfarne. And your 'company' says he has gone back to King William's College looking so well."

"Lindisfarne, that's where we were to have gone if the scarlet fever had not come. Why are people so afraid of scarlet fever?"

"Because the infection lasts a long time, and little, tiny, tiny flakes of skin carry it about to other people."

"That's when I peeled, and had a new skin like a snake, I suppose," said Pearl, laughing.

"Yes, you have been a very dangerous little girl. Sir Ronald wanted to come very much to see you, but Lady Bruce was afraid of her grandchildren catching the fever from Sir Ronald."

"Oh! that's why the 'company' never came," Pearl sighed, "I should like to see him and *father*. O cousin Eleanor! will father come back this year?"

"I hope so, darling."

"But you won't go away when he does?"

"I can't tell yet, dear; I will stay if I can."

"Grandmother is kind, but she is not used to children. Bunny says children are like wild animals to her."

Cousin Eleanor laughed.

"There is not much of a wild animal in you now, my Pearl. I wish you did run about more."

"I don't want to," Pearl said. "I like to watch the blue sea, and I like to hear what the waves say, and oh! when the beautiful white gulls come down, I love them. If Jer had come here, perhaps he would have got well."

"Jer is where there is no more sin, darling; don't let us wish him back."

"I can't help it," said faithful little Pearl. "I loved poor Jer."

"Now look," cousin Eleanor said, "here are Lucy and Ruby, with a quantity of sea-weed and shells, we shall be able to make a lovely box."

"Look," Ruby said, "here's a big yellow shell for the middle of the box, and they are all for you, Pearl."

"Yes; and I went ever so far into the pool to get you this anemone. Is it not a beauty?" Lucy said. "A boy came over the rocks to help me to get it, and then a lady called, or I should say screamed, after him—

"'Don't go, don't go, Ernest; these children have had the scarlet fever!' I am quite tired of hearing it."

"And so am I," said Mrs. Bunce, who now came

panting up with Ellen. "I have no patience with people's fidgets and fads, shunning dear children as if they had the plague; and as to her ladyship letting the little dears go off without a kiss, for fear they should get it, and fuming and fumigating and fussing, and that at over seventy. I have no sort of patience with it!"

Mrs. Christian looked reprovingly at Mrs. Bunce, and she said no more, but went away to get the tea ready, telling Ellen to take care all that lot of seaweed was not brought into the sitting-room.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

#### GOOD-BYE

ONCE more we see the old castle in the sunshine of an early autumn day, and the carriage is turning in at the gates with the children who have come back from Tenby, after six weeks' visit.

Ruby was radiant as ever, and Lucy quite well, but little Pearl was still pale and weak, and was not fit for much exertion of any kind.

"It is nice to get home," she said as the carriage rolled along. "Look! cousin Eleanor, there are two people on the terrace."

"It is grandpapa, I daresay," Lucy exclaimed.

"No, it's not; they are both young men, not like Mr. Dacre," Ruby said.

Cousin Eleanor was now looking earnestly at the figures of the two gentlemen, who evidently saw the carriage, and were turning from the terrace to meet it in the quadrangle.

At last it passed under the quaint old gateway, and there was a joyous exclamation—"The 'company'! Sir Ronald!" and then a cry from Ruby—"Father! father!" as a tall man with a long beard and a thin face, which bore traces of recent illness, held out his arms and folded Ruby close.

"But where are both my Jewels?" Sir Hugh asked.

"Ah, my little Pearl! is this my Pearl?" for in the slim, fragile little creature, waiting so patiently for his notice, Sir Hugh did not recognise the rosy baby child he had left now two years ago.

"My darling!" he said, looking anxiously into her face, as he took her next into his arms, Ruby holding fast to his coat—"My darling! you have been very ill."

"Yes, father," said little Pearl; "but I am getting well. And have you been ill too?"

"What makes you find that out? Yes, I have had a touch of fever too, so I have come home to tell my Jewels about it."

"Did you catch it from the telegrams, father?" Pearl asked in her own funny little voice. This made every one laugh, and Sir Ronald said, as nobody was glad to see him, that he should go away instantly, and pretended to get into the carriage and tell the coachman to drive him back to

Cranworth. And then Pearl leaned down from her father's arms and said—"As if we weren't glad to see our dear 'company." And then they all went into the house, and Lady Aylmer was in the hall looking more pleased than the children had ever seen her; and the servants were all so glad, and old Caleb came toddling up with a bunch of flowers, and Ben stood behind with his finger in his mouth, and every one was happy and glad.

I could not tell you how many amusing things Sir Ronald said, nor how the children tried to make him feel he was "next best" to father, nor how Sir Hugh felt as if he could not make enough of his darlings after their long separation, nor how he looked his thanks at cousin Eleanor when he saw how his little motherless ones had found a loving friend in her. It is hard to write about joy like this, but I like to say good-bye to our Jewels in the sunshine of love and happiness; and the time to say good-bye is come.

This page out of the history of their childhood which I have told you is closed. Another must now follow, but I cannot turn that page. God knows what may be written there. He can trace every step of the way till the last good-bye comes, and the Gates of the City are opening for the children to find there the mother who was the dream of

their infancy, and poor Jer, in whose life on earth little Pearl had such a loving influence.

This much we may say, hope, and believe, that by God's grace and love, Ruby and Pearl will be found where no sorrow and no sin can come, in that Day when the Lord shall make up His jewels.

THE END.

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